

MODERNIZATION OF THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY:  
A THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES?

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

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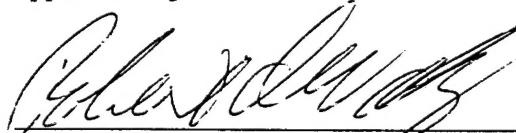
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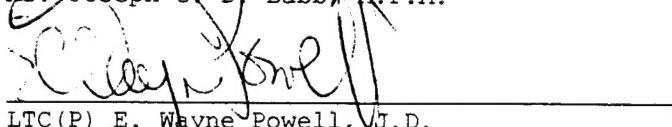
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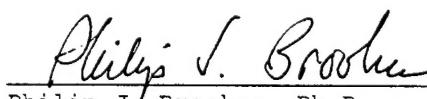
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## ABSTRACT

MODERNIZATION OF THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY: A THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES? by MAJ Joseph W. Blackburn, USA 112 pages.

This study investigates whether or not China, with a modernized military, presents a threat to the United States. The U.S. has been deeply engaged in the East Asia-Pacific region since the end of the Second World War. China, with the world's largest population and a landmass larger than the United States, is located in the heart of the fastest growing economic region in the world. Due in large part to a period of sustained economic growth averaging over 9 percent since 1980, the People's Republic of China has embarked upon a program of military modernization that will significantly increase its force projection capabilities.

The study includes a brief review of relevant Chinese history, current events, diplomacy, economics, and the PLA military modernization program. It includes three case studies in which to examine U.S. and Chinese interests: Taiwan, the Spratly Islands, and Korea.

The methodology used to determine if China's military modernization poses a threat to the U.S. includes an examination of Chinese and U.S. interests in the three case studies. Conflicting interests, coupled with capability, would indicate that China poses a threat. Conversely, complementary interests would argue that even with the increased capability, China does not pose a threat.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>ASEAN</u>	<u>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</u>
<u>CCP</u>	<u>Chinese Communist Party</u>
<u>EEZ</u>	<u>Exclusive Economic Zone</u>
<u>GDP</u>	<u>Gross Domestic Product</u>
<u>GNP</u>	<u>Gross National Product</u>
<u>KMT</u>	<u>Kuomintang</u>
<u>PLA</u>	<u>People's Liberation Army</u>
<u>PLAAF</u>	<u>People's Liberation Air Force</u>
<u>PLN</u>	<u>People's Liberation Navy</u>
<u>PRC</u>	<u>People's Republic of China</u>
<u>ROC</u>	<u>Republic of China (on Taiwan)</u>
<u>TRA</u>	<u>Taiwan Relations Act</u>
<u>UNLOS C</u>	<u>United Nations Law of the Sea Convention</u>

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

China, long viewed as hopelessly backward and relegated on the world stage to virtual third-world status, is a rising power. Henry Kissinger, in his most recent book Diplomacy, sees the Chinese as the most ascendant of all the great, and potentially great, powers.<sup>1</sup> The reasons are obvious. China has 1.2 billion people, an army of 3.2 million, nuclear weapons, a rapidly increasing defense budget and is located in the heart of the fastest growing economic region in the world.

In the past twenty years, the economic growth of many Asian nations has outpaced that of any other region in the world. The strategic importance of this region will continue to grow with its economies.<sup>2</sup> The United States has deep-rooted political, economic, and diplomatic interests in the region and is inextricably linked to its security. While the People's Republic of China has long played a central role in the region, it has emerged as the dominant power due in large part to sustained economic growth averaging over 9 percent annually since 1980. Partly as a result of its increased economic fortunes, China has adopted a military modernization plan that may provide it with a force capable of exerting significant influence over the other countries of the region. This paper examines whether or not China, with a modernized military, poses a threat to the United States.

### Background

Although events in Europe following the end of the Cold War have drawn the preponderance of scholarly thought and current events attention, changes occurring in the Asia-Pacific region may well be the more profound. The United States, albeit with assistance from its NATO allies and Japan, lead and was largely responsible for the Cold War victory and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union and is the world's only remaining superpower.<sup>3</sup> This condition may not last much longer. China, with its enormous population and vast geographic area is emerging as the dominant economic and military power in the Far East. Many argue that, with China's recent sustained economic growth fueled by its transition into a more market-based economy, China is fast approaching superpower status. As significant as its economic potential, China is additionally implementing a military modernization plan that will have a profound impact on the security of the region. This military modernization indicates a clear shift from a land-based, territorial defense force designed to fight a "People's War" to a leaner, high-technological military force with power-projection capabilities. This capability, regardless of possible Chinese intentions, requires an in-depth assessment of the potential threat of a modernized Chinese military to the United States.

A question that may come to mind immediately when considering this topic may be whether or not China, without a modernized military, poses a threat to the United States? After all, a less modern Chinese army fought the United States to a standstill in the Korean War. They proved that mass has a quality of its own by using "human wave" tactics to counter the

technological advantage of the United States in Korea and again against the Vietnamese in 1979. This question, along with the supporting question of what constitutes a modernized Chinese military, will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter. Suffice it to say, at least initially, that China is already in the process of modernizing its forces and the intent of this paper is to examine the potential threat of China with a modernized military.

The United States must determine an appropriate course of action in regard to policy toward China. In order to do this, the U.S. must fully understand the implications of a modernized Chinese military force. No longer is it safe to assume that a Chinese military force will be confined to essentially mainland China and its surrounding territorial waters. The Chinese are serious about developing a force projection capability that will extend its military reach throughout the Pacific Rim.\* Key components of this capability include aerial refueling, modernization of ground forces, acquisition of Kilo-class submarines, and the addition of an aircraft carrier battle group. The question is not whether they will have this capability. Rather, the question is what they intend to do with it and further, what should the U.S. do in response.

China, with a modernized military, could provide a stabilizing effect for the region. Like the majority of other nations, much uncertainty is evident among the nations of the Far East in the post-Cold War security environment. For one thing, the U.S. government's commitment to the region is being questioned. A 1991 study of Chinese, Japanese, and Republic of Korea defense analysts indicates there is broad agreement among the three countries that a U.S. military presence in Asia is a major

contributor to regional stability.<sup>5</sup> However, the study also points to a consensus among the three countries that the U.S. military presence is likely to decline based on decreased U.S.-Soviet tensions and the domestic problems in The United States. Their concern was well founded given that the U.S. has made some troop withdrawals from the region in the past five years. This has caused a great deal of anxiety for regional leaders who are unsure how the balance of power may shift. A real question for Chinese leaders and for the leaders of many other nations in the Far East is to what extent Japan will embark upon a policy of military resurgence in light of a full or partial U.S. pullout? China has a vivid memory of Japanese occupation that entitles it to be concerned over a potential Japanese buildup. Other countries in the region share similar concerns.

If China were to adopt policies favoring the status quo in the region, and if it were willing to commit its military forces to back them up, then modernization may well provide a degree of stability in an era of uncertainty. If, on the other hand, China were to use this increased capability to settle some old scores and regain some territory that it claims by historical right, then this could precipitate a conflict involving U.S. interests in the region. Further, other countries in the region may see no alternative to matching China's growing military strength by improving their military forces with the end result a potential arms race in the region. Some argue this scenario is already underway.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this feeling is best described by Colonel Arsenio L. Tecson, a Philippine Army officer, in a monograph discussing the future of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). He said, "To some, the PRC was seen as a guarantor and a source of support against a hostile

Soviet-Vietnamese alliance. To others, China is a future adversary which is building up its strength to assert regional hegemony when the time is ripe."<sup>7</sup>

The paper will begin with an analysis of the sources of national power. The instruments of power will be considered in the context of a strategic estimate.<sup>8</sup> An analysis of the instruments of power will provide the framework within which to assess the capabilities of the Chinese for projecting their influence throughout the region. The purpose is to determine if China possesses the capability to pose a threat.

The thesis will then focus on the possibility of the use of the Chinese military in resolving three potential areas of conflicting interests between China and the United States: The Spratly Islands, Taiwan, and the Korean peninsula. The thesis will contain a discussion about how China might pose a threat in the context of the three potential problem areas, all of which could result in conflict or cooperation. If a conflict results, then China, with a modernized military, will pose a threat to the United States. If, on the other hand, the analysis points toward both the U.S. and China benefiting from a cooperative solution to the issues, the answer to the research question will be no. In other words, the modernization of the Chinese military would not pose a threat to the United States. Chapter three discusses the research methodology in greater detail.

This thesis will not follow the formal strategic estimate format as described in Joint Publication 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations. Nor will the paper propose a particular course of action for the United States to adopt. Development and analysis of various courses of action would be

an appropriate topic for a subsequent monograph. This will not be a historical thesis although it will contain a brief synopsis of selected historical factors that have a direct influence on the subject.

#### A Historical Perspective

At the risk of oversimplification, an appreciation for certain historical factors is essential to an understanding of this paper. To not, however briefly, discuss some of the factors that bear on this problem would be to assume that the reader agrees with some key components of the thesis without the benefit of examination. Accordingly, some explanation is provided below.

#### Non-recognition of the People's Republic of China

In spite of China's legacy of being the oldest civilization in the world, it must be remembered that during the period 1949-1972 the United States did not formally recognize the government of mainland China. Because Washington backed Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalists during the Chinese Civil War, the United States recognized the government of Taiwan as the legitimate rulers of China following their exodus from the mainland after being defeated by Mao ZeDong's Communists in 1949. While President Nixon did visit China in 1972, it was not until 1 January 1979 that the U.S. government formally recognized the People's Republic of China.

#### China's View of its Role in the World

China is the world's oldest civilization, having been in existence in various forms for approximately 4,000 years.<sup>9</sup> This is a particularly important, yet often overlooked factor when considering modern China.

Before it can be understood why China operates the way it does we must understand how the Chinese see their place in the world order.

The Chinese people see themselves and their country as the center of the world and without equal among other nations. Its name, Zhong Guo, literally means middle kingdom. China's view of the world then, is one in which China is the world's center of gravity and the many other states operate on its periphery. The Chinese consider themselves to be the leaders of Asia, if not the world. They believe that for the larger part of their long history they have had the largest, most prosperous, best-governed and militarily most-proficient society on the planet.<sup>10</sup> China remembers the times when visiting dignitaries would travel great distances to pay homage to the emperor by presenting gifts and performing the kowtow.

The message is to avoid making the classic mistake of assuming that China desires to assimilate itself into the modern world structure. Nor, as will be discussed later in the chapter, is it safe to assume that China will completely adopt western diplomatic protocol. While recognizing that integration into the global economic structure is a necessity in order to capitalize on its enormous economic potential, China cannot be assumed to conform to western ideals and thoughts in a quest for modernization. This factor becomes increasingly important when discussing issues such as human rights, an area in which significant differences separate China and the United States. China emphasizes conformity and solidarity in its society and rejects many Western ethnocentric ideas concerning values to which it does not subscribe great value.

### Foreign Occupation of China

Under the rule of the Qing<sup>11</sup> Dynasty from 1644-1912, China was, in effect, occupied. The Chinese solution was to assimilate the Manchu leadership into Chinese culture, preserving its identity by absorbing its conquerors.<sup>12</sup> The Western powers are also recent imperialists. The British defeated China in the Opium War (1839-42), a humiliating loss that resulted in China signing the Treaty of Nanking that, among other injustices, ceded Hong Kong to Great Britain. In 1997, this lasting reminder of Western imperialism will be erased as China regains control of this important banking and trading center. The Opium War, the Anglo-French invasion of 1856-1860, and the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 all revealed that, in spite of its size, China was extremely vulnerable to outside powers. They also served to illustrate the old Chinese maxim of "internal disorder, external disaster."<sup>13</sup> China was vulnerable to outside powers because China had significant internal problems. These instances of imperialism at the hands of Japan and several Western powers are important because the result is a suspicious China that will clearly seize the opportunity to enhance its security from a position of strength.

China has also been an occupied country in this century, a fact that remains a recent and distasteful memory for many of China's leaders. Japanese occupation of China for much of the early part of this century until 1945 was especially brutal and will not soon be forgotten. The Japanese adoption at one point of a "three-all" strategy, i.e. "kill all, burn all, loot all" went beyond the physical destruction of the Chinese Army and included indiscriminate attacks on the ordinary peasantry.<sup>14</sup> China has strong historic motivation for military modernization.

China is a homogenous country. Over 91 percent of the Chinese population is ethnic Han Chinese.<sup>15</sup> Although over fifty different minorities are recognized within a population that now exceeds 1.2 billion, the math indicates over a billion people who share a common ethnicity. The manifestation of this homogeneity is a tremendous sense of nationalism. This characteristic and its cultural heritage has often been very effective in building political consensus and has long provided Chinese rulers with a source of power.

#### China since 1949

The end of the Chinese civil war marked the beginning of the emergence of modern China. When Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) forces defeated the Nationalists lead by Chiang Kai-shek, a new era in Chinese history was ushered in. From the Chinese perspective, the years following the CCP victory were characterized by continued threats from the United States. In addition to the U.S. refusal to recognize the mainland's "legitimate" government, the U.S. also represented a real danger to China along its borders. China viewed the Korean War, extensive support to Taiwan, and increasing U.S. military involvement in Vietnam as the single largest threat to their security until the Soviet buildup along the Sino-Soviet border began in earnest in the late 1960s.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most significant event in the post-1949 period, at least in the context of how it relates to the modernization of the Chinese military, was the adoption by the Chinese leadership of a program known as the "Four Modernizations." Although initially proposed by Premier Zhou Enlai as early as 1964, the Four Modernizations were not formally adopted as policy until after Chou's death.<sup>17</sup> The policy called for significant

Chinese modernization in the areas of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and defense. The effect was to open China up to interaction with foreign countries and provided a stimulus to Chinese growth. While defense is listed last in the order of priorities, the military has been well served by a revitalization of the Chinese economy. It is the economic successes of the Four Modernizations policy that enabled the Chinese military to undertake the enormous task of modernizing a huge, but technologically backward military force.

#### Current Events

Deng Xiaoping, survivor of the Long March, leader of China since 1978, and overseer of the Four Modernizations, is now over 90 years old. His death, long predicted, will likely have significant implications for the future of China.<sup>18</sup> Opinions on what the future will hold for China as the struggle for its leadership unfolds vary considerably.<sup>19</sup> Many argue that, regardless of who assumes power after Deng, a continuance of China's economic success will require future leaders to "stay the course." The potential remains, however, for China to dissolve into smaller, more manageable pieces reminiscent of the periods when the warlords ruled various factions of China. As a basis for comparison, one analyst cites a common prognosis regarding the former USSR that "any future Revolution is highly likely to retain the framework of the current system in one sense or another."<sup>20</sup> The comparison is clear. The former Soviet republics underwent extraordinary political transformation following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and to assume China is not potentially susceptible to a similar fate would be shortsighted.

### Diplomacy

China has been governed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since 1949 and ostensibly operates under a constitution promulgated in 1982. China, on the world stage, has been both an enemy and an ally of the United States. An enemy in the classic sense during the Korean War, in other ways as a communist adversary during the Cold War, a supporter of Vietnam during that conflict, and the opposing side in the question of the legitimate government of China until U.S. recognition and formal integration into the United Nations clarified that issue in 1971. China has additionally been an ally of the United States in a precarious Sino-US relationship to contain the Soviet Union during the latter half of the Cold War.

An analysis of the diplomatic instrument of power, as it relates to this paper, must attempt to determine if China is strong enough to influence the conduct of other nations. If it fails this most basic test, then it must be assumed that the diplomatic instrument of power does not exist or exists in such limited quantity that it bears no further discussion.

Many believe that China, facing a significant internal challenge to replace Deng Xiaoping, is not in a position to exert its diplomatic influence beyond its borders and that China may well be facing a sort of cataclysmic dissolution like that of the former Soviet Union. Since Chinese leadership is in effect personal, rather than institutional, the transition period following Deng's death will create such instability within China that it will not have the capability to play on the world stage while it faces potential disintegration within.<sup>21</sup> Noted Chinese

analyst Jack A. Goldstone perhaps best captured this sentiment as he summarized the conditions for the coming Chinese collapse when he wrote, "In sum, China shows every sign of a country fast approaching crisis: a burgeoning population and mass migration amid faltering agricultural production and worker and peasant discontent-and all this as the state rapidly loses its capacity to rule effectively."<sup>22</sup>

Of course, not everybody agrees with the above assertions.

Tasheng Huang paints an opposite portrait of a China in transition; "The political system is still quite authoritative, governability has improved, and central economic and political control over regions remains substantial."<sup>23</sup> Huang goes on to identify significant differences in the style of Chinese Communism versus the former Soviet Union highlighting the high degree of racial and ethnic diversity of the USSR as a weakness where China's homogeneity is a clear strength. His point is that, even after the crackdown at Tiananmen Square, the government in China remains popular, it is in no danger of collapse following the pending death of Deng Xiaoping, and that any comparison with the former Soviet Union is fundamentally flawed based on the largely homogeneous racial and ethnic composition of China.

The current and future Chinese government possesses sufficient strength to influence other countries. First, China is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Membership alone implies a significant amount of power in addition to the veto power that each of the five members possesses. Second, China is a confirmed nuclear power with an intercontinental strike capability. Third, China's economic power

bestows a degree of credibility to its actual and perceived diplomatic power.

As evidence of China's considerable diplomatic power, the Clinton administration acquiesced to U.S. business leaders in the decision to not revoke its Most-favored-nation status in spite of continued reports of significant human rights abuses. Finally, most Asian countries have been actively seeking improved economic and security relationships with China, a factor that has allowed China the luxury of not dealing with an anti-China alliance.<sup>24</sup>

#### China's Economy

The policies that reform-minded Deng Xiaoping instituted in 1978 launched a period of unprecedented economic growth for China. The Four Modernizations program established as national priorities: the modernization of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and the military. The results have been phenomenal. China's gross domestic product (GDP) has grown an average of over 9 percent annually since 1980.<sup>25</sup> An estimate of China's 1994 GDP reveals an increase of 11.8 percent.<sup>26</sup> What may be the more telling statistic as it relates the question of China's modernized military is that 40 percent of China's GDP is trade, a figure higher than that of the United States or Japan.<sup>27</sup>

A heavy reliance on trade for a country's economy requires sufficient military strength to guarantee that trade will take place. In contrast, Japan does not need a powerful military since it has fallen under the U.S. security umbrella since the end of the Second World War. In short, Japan has had the benefit of the U.S. military to protect its trade. China, on the other hand, must rely solely on the People's

Liberation Army (PLA) to protect its interests. China's economic power, although substantial and showing all indications of continued growth, is nonetheless linked to its military power.

Does economic growth, even in the proportions of China, necessarily represent power? Further, does substantial economic growth require a powerful military in order to guarantee it will continue? Noted Asian analyst Thomas L. McNaugher says unequivocally yes. "If China continues to grow it will confront the world with a change in power relationships of unprecedented size, ultimately involving the emergence of a power capable of overshadowing Japan, perhaps even the United States."<sup>28</sup>

#### Military Modernization

A basic premise of this paper is that China is modernizing its military forces. According to a 1995 RAND report, the Chinese military is in fact undergoing extensive modernization. "Defense spending has been increasing steadily since the late eighties [averaging well over 10 percent per annum since 1989] and reports suggest that the Chinese leadership intends to maintain such increases for at least the remainder of the nineties."<sup>29</sup> China's defense expenditures, however, are tough to gauge. The official Chinese defense budget grossly underestimates actual spending and almost nobody outside China trusts the budget to be anything near accurate.<sup>30</sup> As an example of why these figures may not even come close to actual expenditures, Chinese equipment purchases are not included in the budget. To underscore this point, China is expected to spend some US \$5 billion on Russian equipment in 1994-95.<sup>31</sup> Swaine estimates that actual defense spending may be two or three, and perhaps as high as six times larger than official numbers.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, differences in real

purchasing power may elevate that figure even higher. Given the inaccuracies, Chinese military spending in 1994 represented a 22 percent increase from 1993 and totaled approximately ¥52 billion (US \$6 billion).<sup>33</sup> China's estimated defense budget for 1995 is ¥63 billion, a 17 percent increase from 1994.<sup>34</sup> Even if Chinese leaders are attempting to camouflage their intentions, China's efforts to modernize its military forces have not gone unnoticed. Current periodicals and newspapers are full of reports on PLA equipment acquisitions.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of China's military modernization plan are efforts to increase its power projection capabilities. This includes the goal of a blue water navy, aerial refueling capability, creation of a rapid reaction force and the continued development of its nuclear arsenal. Each of these four components will be discussed individually.

#### Doctrine

The modernization plan is driven by a strategic change in Chinese military doctrine that occurred in the mid-eighties. Prior to 1984, China clung to the Mao Zedong concept of fighting a "People's War," a strategy defined in 1969 that implied a three-phased campaign to defend the mainland. The first phase would be strategic defense, followed by strategic stalemate, and ultimately strategic offense.<sup>35</sup> Lessons learned in the Korean War, the Sino-Vietnam War of 1979, and most recently from watching the Gulf War in 1991 encouraged Chinese leaders to modify Mao's doctrine into what became commonly known as a People's War under modern conditions. With continued refinement, this doctrine now emphasizes a

smaller, better-trained force with technological advancements made possible by the success of China's economic reform.<sup>36</sup>

People's Liberation Army--Navy (PLAN)

China is attempting to float a blue water navy.<sup>37</sup> The term applies to a navy that is capable of operating well outside of territorial waters. China's navy has not had that capability in recent history. In fact, China has traditionally not been inclined to venture far outside of the China Sea, a reflection of historical indifference to the rest of the world and of China's vision of itself as the center of the world. Until 1982, China's Navy was viewed as only a supporting arm of the Army. This attitude began to change when Liu Huaqing was appointed as commander in chief of the PLAN. Liu reshaped the Chinese vision of the PLAN into a tool to be used in the strategic space of the sea.<sup>38</sup>

For the past several years there have been countless reports of China attempting to acquire an aircraft carrier. China has two ways to do this. First, it could buy one from currency-depleted Russia. Rumors continue to swirl that China is interested in purchasing the former Soviet aircraft carrier Varyag, which is currently located in the Ukraine.<sup>39</sup> The second method to acquire an aircraft carrier is for China to build its own. China may be well on the way to doing just that. Reports indicate that China may be developing plans for the construction of two light aircraft carriers with a projected completion date of 2005.<sup>40</sup> More conservative estimates figure that China will not be able to commission an aircraft carrier prior to the year 2010.<sup>41</sup>

While the addition of an aircraft carrier may be the most noticeable, the PLAN is also continuing the process of upgrading other

naval forces. China will continue to improve its surface fleet by building more destroyers, frigates, and missile patrol boats.<sup>42</sup> It has also acquired four Kilo-class submarines, out of a total of ten ordered from Russia, considered to be among the best diesel-powered submarines in the world.<sup>43</sup> The reestablishment of the Chinese Marine Corps in 1980 may have been the first indicator of China's desire to increase its force projection capability.<sup>44</sup> The PLAN Marine Corps is currently improving its capability to operate in the high-seas environment. It is now equipped with faster, larger, and more mobile assault ships that will enable it to more effectively participate in force projection operations.<sup>45</sup>

As a necessary component for a blue water capability, naval logistics is keeping pace with modernization. First, the PLAN has added mobile marine support vessels to the inventory, replacing "bow-to-stern" resupply with "side-by-side" underway techniques. The addition of Chinese-built, helicopter-capable resupply ships in 1991 has also extended the operating radius of the PLAN.<sup>46</sup>

#### People's Liberation Army--Air Forces (PLAAF)

The PLAAF, not unlike the rest of the PLA, has historically operated under the principle of quantity over quality. This is also changing as the Chinese continue their force modernization efforts. The most notable addition to the PLAAF has been the acquisition of twenty-six Su-27 Fighter aircraft from Russia in 1992.<sup>47</sup> The Su-27 provides the PLAAF with an advanced fighter that can range the Spratly and Senkaku island groups, both contested territories that China has publicly stated it will not relinquish. While some reports have indicated China wants to make up to two additional purchases of twenty-four Su-27s, potentially bringing

its total up to seventy-two, a dispute over payments has temporarily delayed delivery of the second order.<sup>48</sup> Further, China wants to open its own production line of Su-27s, a move that the Russians have not agreed upon as yet.<sup>49</sup>

There are additional reports of a joint project with the Russians for the production of a new fighter for the PLAAF. Initially thought to be bargaining for the purchase of MiG-31s, China appears to be interested in importing specific technology of the aircraft, notably the MiG-31's fire control and early warning radar, perhaps with the ultimate goal of joint development of a brand-new fighter that would incorporate proven MiG-31 technology with new generation avionics.<sup>50</sup>

Yet another major PLAAF acquisition is one of ten Il-76 transport aircraft.<sup>51</sup> The Il-76 is a medium transport aircraft comparable to the U.S. C-141. The primary purpose of these aircraft will be to provide tactical transport and resupply of the PLA rapid reaction forces. Finally, the PLAAF has been seeking to add an air-to-air refueling capability to enhance its power projection capabilities. Some reports identify three Il-76s as having been equipped as air-to-air refueling tankers and currently stationed at the Chinese base of Hainan Dao, a large island with immediate access to the South China Sea.<sup>52</sup> Others suggest that China is negotiating with Iran and Israel for the purchase of air-to-air refueling tankers.<sup>53</sup>

#### People's Liberation Army--Ground Forces (PLA)

The PLA is also in the midst of a selected upgrade. Selected because the sheer size of the ground forces limits the Chinese on the pace of modernization. First, in keeping with the power projection objective,

some units of the PLA have been designated as *quantou* (Chinese for fist) units, so named to symbolize the power of the punch.<sup>54</sup> Estimates place the percentage of Chinese ground units designated as these "fist" units between 400-500 thousand, or about one quarter of the approximately 2.2 million strong PLA.<sup>55</sup> Further, the Chinese have formed a Rapid Reaction Force of approximately fifteen thousand airborne troops which it claims can be deployed to any Chinese territory within 20 hours, a claim made more credible given the addition of the 10 Il-76 tactical transport aircraft mentioned earlier.

While most analysts agree that the Chinese are also attempting to upgrade the PLA hardware, there is much disagreement on how they are doing it. Caldwell reports that China is negotiating for the purchase of 440 T-72 main battle tanks as well as attack helicopters, ground based radars, night vision devices, laser range finders and advanced munitions.<sup>56</sup> Other reports suggest that China has already purchased some 50 T-80 tanks and is interested in an additional buy of between 200 and 400 advanced T-80s.<sup>57</sup>

#### Nuclear Forces

Of the world's nuclear powers, China has been the third largest in terms of delivery vehicles and the fourth largest in regard to warheads since 1980.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, in spite of apparent support of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, China has continued nuclear testing. They, along with France, are the only remaining members of the nuclear club who have recently tested nuclear weapons. China has conducted nine nuclear tests in the nineties,<sup>59</sup> possibly in an attempt to beat the ratification of the treaty which may come as early as 1996. Further, China has two *Xia*-class nuclear-powered submarines in its operational fleet that carry

twelve nuclear weapons with a range of 6,000 kilometers. In addition to its strategic weapons, China has deployed 150 tactical nuclear weapons that could be used in any regional conflict.<sup>60</sup>

#### Summary

China has sufficient economic, military and diplomatic power to affect United States interests in the Far East. The United States has significant economic interests in the region and has maintained a military presence there since the end of the Second World War. Additionally, many other nations in the region have long depended on the United States for maintaining the balance of power. An ascending China threatens to upset the balance of power in the region and is a serious concern for the United States. This is not imply that a military conflict is either inevitable or desirable. The United States has numerous policy options in regard to China. They range from engagement to containment and numerous combinations in between. To determine whether or not China, with a modernized military, poses a threat to the United States this paper will examine the potential Chinese use of military forces in the context of the the Taiwan question, the Spratly Islands dispute, and the future of the Korean peninsula. Of course these are not the only areas of potential conflicting/complementary interests between the United States and China. There are many other possible areas of study to determine the likelihood of a Chinese military threat to the United States. These areas were chosen because they offer opportunities to explore each country's interests and the very real possibility of armed conflict of some nature. China, by most accounts, will continue to grow economically even as it faces internal leadership challenges. And if its history is a reliable

indicator, China will not disintegrate into many smaller pieces. The result is a China that represents, as Kissinger said, the most ascendant of the great, and potentially great, powers. For these reasons it is prudent that significant attention be given to China's existing and potential capabilities. Hopefully this paper will add something to the growing body of work on the subject.

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 829.

<sup>2</sup>"Asia Pacific," Strategic Assessment 1995, (Washington D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1995), 18.

<sup>3</sup>Superpower status is defined as a country possessing sufficient military and economic power to unilaterally project its will anywhere in the world. Many countries would qualify if only one of the two above qualifications were required.

<sup>4</sup>Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Real Chinese Threat," New York Times Weekly Magazine, (27 August 1995): 50.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas L. Wilborn, How Northeast Asians View Their Security, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1991), ix.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Beaver, "China Rejects Arms Race Concerns," Jane's Sentinel, (September 1994): 2.

<sup>7</sup>Arsenio L. Tecson, "The Future and Prospect of ASEAN" (Monograph, Naval Postgraduate School, 1994), 47.

<sup>8</sup>U.S. Army, text C510 Strategic, Operational and Joint Environments, (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1995) 273.

<sup>9</sup>John King Fairbank, China: A New History, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 42.

<sup>10</sup>Steven Mufson, "Measuring the Muscle in China's Military Future," The Washington Post weekly Edition, July 31-August 6, 1995, 16-17.

<sup>11</sup>For clarification and ease of reading, the Pinyin system of spelling will be used in this paper except in the cases of direct quotes or instances where the Wade-Giles interpretation is the more familiar term. An example of the where the Wade-Giles exception will be made is the spelling of Chiang Kai-Shek, the pinyin spelling would be Jiang Jeshi.

<sup>12</sup>Fairbank, 214.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 248.

<sup>15</sup>Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook 1995, (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, 1995), 88.

<sup>16</sup>Christopher J. Huber, "Security Assistance in the Modernization of the People's Liberation Army" (Master's Thesis, Air University, 1988) 8.

<sup>17</sup>Fairbank, 340.

<sup>18</sup>Arthur Waldron, "After Deng the Deluge," Foreign Affairs, (September/October 1995): 148.

<sup>19</sup> For opposing views on the future of China following the death of Deng Xiaoping see Foreign Policy, (Summer 1995): 35-68. Jack Goldstone's "The Coming Chinese Collapse," and Yasheng Huang's "Why China Will Not Collapse," argue both sides of the issue.

<sup>20</sup>Arthur Waldron's article "After Deng the Deluge" is a review essay of Kenneth Lieberthal's book Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform, New York, W. W. Norton, 1995.

<sup>21</sup>Bryce Harland, "For A Strong China," Foreign Affairs, (Spring 1994): 50.

<sup>22</sup>Jack A. Goldstone, "The Coming Chinese Collapse," Foreign Policy, (Summer 1995): 51.

<sup>23</sup>Yasheng Huang, "Why China Will Not Collapse," Foreign Policy, (Summer 1995): 55.

<sup>24</sup>Chung Pinlin, "Red Fist: China's Army in Transition," International Defense Review, (February 1995): 34.

<sup>25</sup>Michael D. Swaine, China, Domestic Change and Foreign Policy, (Santa Monica, CA: National Defense Research Institute, 1995), 60.

<sup>26</sup>CIA World Factbook 1995, 89.

<sup>27</sup>James Lilley, "Freedom Through Trade," Foreign Policy, (Spring 1994): 42.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas L. McNaugher, "A Strong China: Is the United States Ready?," The Brookings Review, (Fall 1994): 15.

<sup>29</sup>Swaine, 76.

<sup>30</sup>Richard A. Bitzinger, "China's Defense Budget," International Defense Review, (February 1995): 35.

<sup>31</sup>Michael Pugh, "Maritime Disputes in the China Seas," Jane's Intelligence Review Yearbook, (1995): 107.

<sup>32</sup>Bitzinger, 35.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>34</sup>CIA World Factbook, 1995: 90.

<sup>35</sup>Caldwell, 1.

<sup>36</sup>Frederick H. Grant, "China at the Turn of the Century: A Handbook for Operational Planners" (Monograph, Naval War College, 1993), 39.

<sup>37</sup>Virtually all sources that discuss Chinese military modernization believe China is attempting to expand its naval capabilities. See, among others, Jihong Zhang "China Heads Toward Blue Waters," International Defense Review, (November 1993): 879.

<sup>38</sup>Zhang, 879.

<sup>39</sup>Philip L. Ritcheson, "China's Impact on Southeast Asian Security," Military Review, (May 1994): 46.

<sup>40</sup>John Caldwell, China's Conventional Military Capabilities: 1994-2004, (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994), 9.

<sup>41</sup>Paul Beaver, "China's Naval Ambitions and the South China Sea," Jane's Sentinel, South China Sea Special Newsletter, (December 1994): 2.

<sup>42</sup>Caldwell, 10.

<sup>43</sup>Mufson, 16.

<sup>44</sup>Pinlin, 33.

<sup>45</sup>Zhang, 880.

<sup>46</sup>Pinlin, 30.

<sup>47</sup>Caldwell, 10. While Caldwell says China acquired 26 Su-27s, Pinlin states the number at 24, Zhang says 28.

<sup>48</sup>Mufson, 16.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>50</sup>Zhang, 880.

<sup>51</sup>Caldwell, 10.

<sup>52</sup>Beaver, 2.

<sup>53</sup>Pugh, 109; Caldwell, 11.

<sup>54</sup>Pinlin, 32.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>56</sup>Caldwell, 6.

<sup>57</sup>"Russia's Asian Sales Onslaught," International Defense Review, (May 1995): 49.

<sup>58</sup>Pinlin, 32.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 32; "China Criticized for Latest Nuclear Test," Associated Press news report, 18 August, 1995.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 32.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There lies a sleeping giant [China]. Let him sleep.  
For when he wakes, he will move the world.<sup>1</sup>

NAPOLEON

This familiar quote from Napoleon may best summarize the world's historic attitude toward China. The essence of the quote is that China has enormous potential that it has not yet been able to realize. Coupled with China's historic tendency to not look far beyond its own borders, China has thus been labeled as the sleeping giant. The question is, is this characterization still accurate? Or, as Napoleon feared, is China awakening? If China is awakening, what are the implications?

There is a vast amount of literature available on this subject. Therefore, this review will, of necessity, be representative as opposed to comprehensive. There are many opinions on the question of China as a threat to the United States and to the West. Most readily agree that China's economic and military stature has improved substantially over the past fifteen years and is steadily increasing. The diversion of opinion is essentially in two broad areas. First is how China's growth will affect the United States, the Far East region, and the rest of the world. Second is how China will adapt internally to accommodate the enormous changes brought about by its extraordinary economic growth. In regards to a military threat, few see immediate conflict between the U.S. and China

as a likely scenario. Most agree, however, that many potentially destabilizing issues exist.

As mentioned in chapter one, Henry Kissinger sees the Chinese as the most ascendant of all the great, and potentially great, powers.<sup>2</sup> He unhesitatingly states that China is on the road to superpower status. As a convincing piece of evidence of China's awakening, Kissinger points out that some experts predict China's gross national product will approach that of the United States' by the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century. Further, that a deep-seated sense of national cohesion and its growing military power will make China the dominant power in Asia. Other countries in the region, namely Japan and the two Koreas, will seek to counter Chinese strength through various strategies that will almost certainly concern the interests, objectives, and security strategy of the United States.

Kissinger views the situation as reminiscent of the European balance-of-power system of the nineteenth century. He compares the position of the United States to the role of Great Britain in Europe until the end of the Second World War. That is to say that the United States has the capacity, though not necessarily the desire or intention, to maintain the balance of power in Asia. To this end, Kissinger asserts that the United States cannot wait until the balance is in jeopardy, that it must continue to remain engaged in appropriate Asian forums.

Kissinger's thoughts are consistent with many China analysts. Few, if any, fear a surge of Chinese imperialism. China, historically, not been an expansionist power. So-called Chinese imperialism has been limited to the areas along its borders, with limited exceptions.

Unfortunately for most of its neighbors, China has a long history from which to base its historical claims. China's irredentism, along with the question of Taiwan, are the most likely areas of conflict with other nations that could possibly involve the United States.

Not surprisingly, Richard Nixon, who along with Kissinger was largely responsible for the reestablishment of relations with China in 1972, painted an optimistic portrait of Sino-U.S. relations. Although primarily focusing on what actions the United States must take in order to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with the Chinese, Nixon nonetheless recognizes the potential power of China. In his book 1999, Nixon credits Deng Xiaoping with "lifting the deadening weight of total bureaucratic planning and freeing the enormous potential of a fifth of the world's people."<sup>3</sup> In doing so, assuming that China continues to follow Deng's path, he predicted that China would certainly achieve superpower status.

Although the material may be somewhat dated, Nixon addresses a subject that is at the very heart of this paper. When discussing the practical reasons behind the renewing of Sino-U.S. relations, he explains a second historical problem that remains relevant today. That problem, from China's standpoint, is the specter of encirclement. The encirclement that brought the U.S. and China together in 1972 was primarily of Soviet origin, at least the Soviets presented the most significant perceived threat on China's borders. China, relegated to the role of junior partner in the Soviet bloc during the early years of CCP rule, was increasingly unwilling to remain subordinate to the Soviet Union. Yet China was unable to counter the strength of the Soviet Union alone. Moreover, with Japan,

Korea, the United States (in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam), and the Soviet Union postured along its borders, China was, strategically speaking, surrounded. Although the players have been rearranged, the situation remains remarkably similar today. With Russia, Japan, the two Koreas, Vietnam, Mongolia and, in a sense, the United States postured along its borders, this fear of encirclement creates a real security question for China.

The strategic situation that has made China vulnerable for centuries still exists today. That China sought an informal security relationship with the United States against the Soviet Union was a reflection of its inability to protect itself unilaterally. Given China's growing strength, this situation may change. China may already be in a position not only to adequately protect its own borders, but to project regionally or globally and pose a threat to others. The potential for armed conflict in the region remains real.

So much of Deng Xiaoping's works are relevant to this paper that it would be impossible to address them all. Two issues in particular, however, have a direct bearing on the possibility of a U.S.-Chinese confrontation. These include the reunification of Taiwan and the modernization of the Chinese military. In regard to the first point, the only questions regarding reunification as far as the Chinese are concerned are when and how it will happen. Deng's goal was to return Taiwan to the motherland in the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> On numerous occasions he cites this as an ever-present and important issue on the Chinese agenda. With the success of the four modernizations and more economic growth, Deng states that China will be in a better position to accomplish reunification.<sup>5</sup> Given

continued U.S. support of Taiwan, albeit significantly reduced since 1972, this issue is potentially the most destabilizing.

Second, China has demonstrated a continuing and substantial effort to improve its military forces. "On the basis of our steadily expanding economy, we must improve the army's weapons and equipment and speed up the modernization of our national defense."<sup>6</sup> Deng made this statement in a speech to the People's Liberation Army in 1981. He further stated that China must work hard to improve its ability to conduct combined operations involving the various services and arms under modern conditions.<sup>7</sup> The Chinese government has not wavered in these goals for the past fifteen years and, given the economic success China has enjoyed, there is little reason to question whether they are going to change anytime soon.

Longtime China analyst Harry Harding postulates that the near term relationship between the United States and China will be characterized either by a continuation of the present strained relationship or a degeneration into confrontation.<sup>8</sup> Although he does not necessarily predict open conflict, he sees the most probable scenario characterized by a suspension of most cultural ties, a degradation of economic relations and even the adoption of confrontational diplomatic postures.

Harding identifies several areas that will precipitate this degeneration of Sino-U.S. relations.<sup>9</sup> Foreign arms sales, human rights questions, and unfair trade practices threaten to spoil the tenuous Beijing-Washington relationship. The possible emergence of a repressive government in the post-Deng era, particularly one that engages in severe violations of human rights, could cause a deterioration. A more assertive posture in the international arena, one that openly challenges the United

States and the West either unilaterally or through a coalition of third world nations, would also trigger a more hostile relationship.

The U.S. relationship with Taiwan is perhaps the most likely point of possible military confrontation with China. The possibility of a Taiwanese formal declaration of independence from the mainland would force Beijing's hand on the issue and could result in armed conflict. These factors, and several more, lead Harding to believe that the future of Sino-US relations is anything but secure.

Michael D. Swaine, in a 1995 RAND Report analyzing the political-military, social, and economic developments within China for the evolution of Chinese foreign policy over the next ten to fifteen years concludes that China's existing authoritarian government and foreign policy will likely continue for many years into the post-Deng period.<sup>10</sup> Further, that Chinese foreign policy will continue to be characterized by caution and pragmatism, governed by the need for a peaceful regional environment to allow continued emphasis on economic reform.

Swaine underscores that the future is not likely to produce a more democratic and pro-western regime. Nor does he believe that the post-Deng era will result in a complete breakdown of political rule or the rise of independent regional power centers. He does see the possibility for far more adverse external behavior, however, resulting from problems in economic policy and the increasing influence of ultraconservative nationalistic sentiments. Further, that the ongoing social change in China is simultaneously producing the prospect of enormous internal unrest, with accompanying negative implications for the regional security environment.

China's view of the United States, according to Swaine, is mixed. First, China sees good relations with the United States as essential for, among others, assuring the success of domestic economic reform, countering the possible reemergence of Japanese militarism and lowering U.S. incentives for providing military assistance to Taiwan. This desire for good relations with the United States, however, is offset by suspicion of U.S. intentions. Swaine captures this dichotomous Chinese sentiment by saying:

In this new environment, the United States is viewed with particular suspicion as the only remaining superpower in a multipolar world, increasingly challenged by emerging major powers such as Germany and Japan, constrained by internal and political weaknesses, critical to Chinese development, yet seeking to prevent China's full emergence as a major economic and military power.<sup>11</sup>

Evan A. Feigenbaum, in a RAND Report analyzing the Taiwan issue, identifies a particularly disturbing development.<sup>12</sup> Since 1949, the Kuomintang (KMT) has ruled Taiwan. The KMT position has always been that it was the legitimate government of China so the basis of the Taiwan question since 1949 has been the contest between the CCP and the KMT on who is the rightful government. An opposition party has emerged recently in Taiwan, however, that has publicly raised the issue of the island's independence. This has enraged the mainland government who has repeatedly and forcefully disavowed any consideration of independence. Additionally, the KMT itself has undergone considerable change as the civil war generation gradually cedes power to younger and increasingly more Taiwan-born leaders. Concurrently, Taiwan businesses have invested heavily in mainland China as restrictions have been relaxed. The result is that the political debate has intensified while the economic ties have increased the interdependence of the two countries.

There is considerable political consensus on the island in favor of independence. Feigenbaum's opinion is that the potential for cross-Strait conflict lies in the context of domestic change in Taiwan, change that is clearly happening and is perhaps irreversible. With Chinese power growing, some Taiwanese may also perceive that the window of opportunity for achieving independence is closing. From Beijing's perspective, the democratization of Taiwan has expedited the process of independence, a situation China has repeatedly denounced.

John Caldwell, while acknowledging many potential dangers, states that it would be overly simplistic to label China as a threat at this time. "Although its political intentions and objectives in the region remain vague, China is an ascending power within Asia and, as it develops economically, will likely continue to modernize its military in order to protect its political and economic interests."<sup>13</sup> While documenting significant improvements in the PLA's organization and equipment, he sees China pursuing its political goals mainly through dialogue and political coercion as opposed to direct military action.

As a final source for insight into the question of the Chinese threat, Chiang Kai-Shek wrote almost fifty years ago:

China has suffered most and longest from foreign oppression. Hence her demand for freedom and equality is also the most urgent. In presenting such a demand to the world, she has not been actuated by any desire for "the leadership of Asia," as some skeptical critics have imagined. In her dealings with neighboring countries, China has throughout the centuries fought only "righteous wars" for self-defense or for "restoring the vanquished and reestablishing the fallen." She has never fought wars of aggression against other nations. During the last hundred years the movement for the removal of national humiliation and the development of national strength has grown in answer to the unanimous demand of our people. In this movement there are two implications which we Chinese must know and which we wish the outside world also to know. First, an independent and strong China will in no case seek to inflict upon other nations

the pains and sufferings which she herself has experienced. Much less does China want, after Japan has been defeated, to inherit the mantle of Japanese imperialism or to become the "leader of Asia." Secondly, an independent and strong China means nothing more than a China standing on her own feet, and for this purpose she must seek freedom and independence in both the spiritual and the material sense; she must seek progress and development as regards her national defense, economy, politics and culture.<sup>14</sup>

This passage by Chiang Kai-Shek, although framed in terms of nonaggression, addresses the very essence of the question. While not an imperialistic threat, China will seek to restore lost territories and build its economic, political, and military strength. Further, China has a long memory, as evidenced by the repeated references to the period of national humiliation. Whether or not the current Chinese leadership espouses a similar position is debatable, the fact that the Chinese may soon be in a position to accomplish Chiang Kai-Shek's goals is not.

In summary, the body of scholarly thought on the question of a China as an emerging world power is divided. Some informed analysts see a resurgence of Chinese nationalism which, when coupled with increased military capabilities and an uncertain internal political future, could result in a regional threat with global implications. Others see current developments as the natural progression of a country enjoying a sustained period of economic growth with little cause for alarm about possible Chinese intentions. There is broad consensus, though, that the Chinese will seek to restore lost territories, either by peaceful or forceful means, and continue to increase their national strength in the political, economic, and military arenas.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Richard Nixon, 1999, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 242.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 829.

<sup>3</sup>Nixon, 243.

<sup>4</sup>Deng Xiaoping, "The Present Situation and Tasks Before Us," Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982), (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 225.

<sup>5</sup>While the military is listed last in the order of priority of the four modernizations, the PLA has clearly benefited from China's recent economic growth. It could be argued that growth in the economy, agriculture and science and technology were necessary steps in the modernization of the PLA. Further, that the order of the four modernizations was based on achieving the necessary conditions by which the military could be modernized in order to achieve far-reaching political goals such as reunification of Taiwan.

<sup>6</sup>Deng Xiaoping, "Build Powerful, Modern and Regularized Revolutionary Armed Forces," Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982), (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 372.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 372.

<sup>8</sup>Harry Harding, A Fragile Relationship, (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1992), 323.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 315-317.

<sup>10</sup>Michael D. Swaine, China, Domestic Change and Foreign Policy, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1995), xiii-xv.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>12</sup>Evan A. Feigenbaum, Change in Taiwan and Potential Adversity in the Strait, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1995), 1-3.

<sup>13</sup>John Caldwell, China's Conventional Military Capabilities, 1994-2004, (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994), 25.

<sup>14</sup>Chiang Kai-Shek, China's Destiny, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947: 231.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The question of China, with a modernized military, as a threat to the United States is a complex one. The answer is dependent on a significant number of variables that are not easily defined in a neat package. If, however, it can be established that China has the military capability to pose a threat to the United States, either at the present time or in the near future, then the challenge becomes one of establishing whether or not China will act in such a manner that results in a military confrontation. In other words, the answer to the question of a Chinese threat depends on the degree to which China is likely to commit an act that threatens the vital interests of the United States or otherwise results in a U.S. military response.

The purpose of Chapter One was to introduce the subject, establish the problem and examine the existing capabilities and modernization plans of the Chinese military. A great deal of attention was paid to the modernization plan in order to establish that the Chinese possess the capability, and are intent on increasing this capability, to threaten United States interests in the region.

The remainder of the paper will focus on three case studies that will provide the opportunity to examine the nature of China's interests as compared to those of the United States in three distinctly different, yet interrelated areas. The Taiwan "one-China" question, the Spratly Islands

dispute, and the future of Korea represent potential problem areas for U.S.-Chinese relations, the Far East Region and indeed the rest of the world. Clearly there are numerous additional issues that could, and should, be examined. The human rights problems in China provide a great example of significant divergence of interests between the United States and China. These three particular areas were selected, however, because they represent current and near-term issues with the potential for armed conflict and are additionally decidedly different in nature. In short, destabilizing issues that could quickly evolve into major regional crises between two, or perhaps several, nations seeking resolution through military means.

Taiwan has been an issue since Chiang Kai-Shek and the Chinese Nationalists were forced off the mainland at the end of the Chinese Civil war in 1949. The PRC and the Republic of China (ROC) have both claimed to be the legitimate governments of all of China since that time. The dilemma, for the greater part of the past 45 years, has been characterized as one China-two governments. That is changing. What may indeed prove to be the most destabilizing is the growing consensus among the Taiwanese of the desire for independence. This is a completely unacceptable solution to Beijing and could precipitate the hasty resolution of the question by military means.

The Spratly Islands dispute, directly involving at least five countries and indirectly involving most of the world's maritime nations, may represent the most likely scenario for conflict in the Far East. Chinese irredentism, though certainly not limited to the Spratly Islands, is a growing concern for U.S. policy makers. Not only does it provide an

incentive for the Chinese to continue their military modernization efforts, it could also increase the chances that the Chinese leadership's would resort to a military solution to resolve the issues. The Spratly Islands, arguably the most important of Chinese irredentists claims, provide an ideal forum to examine U.S. and Chinese interests.

The Korean Peninsula, in addition to being the location of the last war between the U.S. and China, is one of the most heavily armed regions in the world and represents the final vestige of the Cold-War bipolar world. The dynamics of the new world order may provide the framework for a peaceful reunification of the two Koreas. The prospects for peaceful reunification, however, continue to be offset by factors that could result in conventional or even nuclear war on the peninsula. Both China and the United States have vested interests in the future of Korea. China, primarily because of its location on their border. South Korea has additionally been a major factor in the U.S. role in the region for the past 45 years. The question of if, and how, the reunification takes place provides an excellent opportunity to examine U.S. and Chinese interests and will be the third and final case study of this paper.

Given the above introduction, the methodology that will be used to answer the research question will be an assessment of the three case studies in regard to whether the evidence indicates competing or complementary interests between the United States and China. If the body of evidence indicates complementary interests, then the answer to the question will be no, that China, even with a modernized military, does not pose a threat to United States interests. If, on the other hand, the evidence indicates conflicting interests, then the answer will be yes.

The question, however, does not readily lend itself to a clear-cut, yes-or-no answer. The answer is more likely to be found between the two extremes. The task, therefore, will be to assess the degree of threat that China poses. For example, if the analysis shows conflicting interests in one of the three areas, the threat will be low and the case for a Chinese threat will be tenuous. If the analysis shows conflicting interests in two of the areas, the assessment will be made that there is a moderate threat. Three of three cases showing conflicting interests indicates a high degree of threat.

Each case study will likely reveal a unique set of interests for both countries although some overlap is certain to occur. Each case study will accordingly be addressed independently.

The focal point of the three case studies will be on an analysis of U.S. and Chinese interests. Interests are central to the analysis of a potential Chinese threat. Interests are a state's wants, needs and concerns. They signal a country's desires and intentions to other states and represent the "why" of national security strategy.<sup>1</sup> They can be tangible or intangible, constant, or changing. Interests provide guidelines and motivation for forming national security strategy and national military strategy. The most common, generic interests include survival and security; political and territorial integrity; economic stability and well being; and stability and world order.<sup>2</sup>

In general terms, complementary interests may be those in which a given solution to a problem will benefit both the U.S. and China. The issue of Japanese rearmament offers an example. Neither the United States or China would prefer to see a resurgence of Japanese militarism. Based

on a recent history of Japanese occupation, China would almost certainly feel threatened. The United States would likewise be made very uncomfortable with a strong Japanese military force and its possible implications for the region. In the broadest terms, then, both the U.S. and China would have similar, or complementary interests in preventing the resurgence of Japanese militarism.

Conversely, competing or conflicting interests are those in which the two countries would seek opposing solutions to a particular issue. Take the possible expansion of the ASEAN charter to include a mutual defense clause as an example. China would vigorously oppose a military coalition on its border. Taken separately, none of the ASEAN nations pose a serious military threat to China. Collectively, however, the scenario changes. A militarily strengthened ASEAN would give China pause before asserting its irredentist claims against one of the member nations. On the other hand, an ASEAN military clause would very likely provide a degree of assurance to the United States in regards to the area's balance-of-power and regional stability. Hence, we have a situation where the United States and China would have conflicting interests.

Competing interests do not necessarily precipitate conflict. Nor do complementary interests guarantee stability. They do, however, provide indicators of the possibility of confrontations or the likelihood of peaceful resolution of issues. They are the basis for analysis in this paper and support the application of the deductive reasoning process to an otherwise subjective topic. If China has the military capability to pose a threat to the United States then we must examine the interests of the

two nations to determine whether they are competing or complementary in order to assess the possibility that force may be used.

In summary, no formula exists that will provide a definitive answer to the question of whether or not China, with a modernized military, poses a threat to the United States. The methodology described above supports the deductive reasoning process in determining the presence or absence of a threat. China does have, and will continue to improve, the capability to threaten U.S. interests in the region. The next step is to compare interests to determine their complementary or competing nature. A preponderance of complementary interests will lead to a conclusion of a low threat. Conversely, a majority of conflicting interests will result in a conclusion of a high threat. A moderate threat is to be found between the two. While the nature of the problem statement does not lend itself to a definitive answer, an assessment of the degree of threat based on the three case studies should assist in the examination of future policy options and add to the body of work on the subject.

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Ted Davis, "National Strategic Concepts, Strategic, Operational and Joint Environments," Strategic, Operational and Joint Environments, (Text C510, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, August, 1995), 39.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 39.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TAIWAN

Chinese Party Chairman and President Jiang Zemin characterizes "the question of Taiwan as the most important and sensitive issue in China-US relations."<sup>1</sup> Additionally, it remains the one issue where there is no clear solution except for maintaining the status quo, something that is becoming increasingly harder to do. Why is a small island like Taiwan such a defining issue in the relationship of the world's only superpower and the next nation most likely to attain superpower status?

China, historically, has had problems on its periphery. Currently, in addition to the problems of growing separatist sentiments in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia, three of its claimed territories, Taiwan, Macao, and Hong Kong, remain essentially outside of Beijing's control. Of these three territories, the return of Hong Kong and Macao has been negotiated and will occur before the turn of the century. Unlike the former foreign colonies, no such arrangement exists for the incorporation of Taiwan.

Is Taiwan a nation-state or a province? The response depends on who is answering the question. Currently, it would be accurate to say that it is both, or perhaps neither.<sup>2</sup> The relevance of the Taiwan question to this paper is its value as a forum within which to examine overall U.S. and Chinese interests. Taiwan poses a series of interesting questions, the most important one being how the issue of the island's

sovereignty or subordination to Chinese government will ultimately be solved. The Beijing Government has never wavered on its commitment to return the island to PRC control. The Taiwanese, despite having proclaimed that they are the legitimate government of all of China for the better part of their existence, are seen to be increasingly leaning toward independence although they have certainly backed off in the face of China's military threats.

Taiwan has prospered outside of Beijing's control. Taiwan's economic development in the past three decades is one of the world's true economic miracles. Real growth in GNP has averaged about 9 percent a year during the past three decades. Its per capita income grew from \$387 in 1970 to \$12,070 in 1994 and is expected to exceed \$14,000 by the end of this year.<sup>3</sup>

Taiwan is an island in the western Pacific Ocean surrounded by approximately 20 other smaller islands considered geologically linked to it.<sup>4</sup> The island makes up most of what is known as the Republic of China, also referred to as Nationalist China or Formosa. It is approximately 250 miles long and 80 miles wide at the center, and including the surrounding islands, has a total land mass of some 14,000 square miles, or about the size of the state of Massachusetts.

Taiwan's population numbered over 21.5 million in 1995.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, for a nation of 1.2 billion, this statistic plays a large role in the increasing Chinese concern over Taiwan's independence for it represents a growth of nearly 400 percent since 1940. The significance is that now less than 15 percent of the Taiwanese population are of mainland Chinese descent compared to a substantially higher percentage in the years

following the Chinese Civil War.<sup>6</sup> Today's ethnic makeup is nearly 85 percent Taiwanese (although of historical Chinese descent, the majority do not consider themselves to be Chinese), 14 percent mainland-born and 1.5 percent aborigine.

For the better part of its history, Taiwan has been inhabited by an aboriginal people of uncertain origin. These early inhabitants were roughly divided between coastal and mountain people who survived largely through hunting, fishing and some primitive agriculture. If these aborigines are genetically linked to some ancient Chinese peoples who migrated to Taiwan, no hard evidence exists to support it. Though visible from China's Fukien Province and easily accessible by boat across the Taiwan Strait, there was little mention of Taiwan in early official documents of Chinese history.<sup>7</sup> This fact, coupled with early Chinese court records that indicate Taiwan was not regarded as part of China by the government, make modern Chinese claims of ancient historical ownership questionable.<sup>8</sup>

Some Chinese leaders cite an A.D. 239 expedition to explore the island as a legal basis to claim the island even though no claim was filed in Chinese courts nor was any follow-on mission sent.<sup>9</sup> The period of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) witnessed the beginning of Chinese emigration to the island even though officially it was a violation of law to emigrate to Taiwan. Most settlers did not intend on returning to China, nor was their intent to claim the island for China. Even during the period of the Yuan Dynasty (1263-1294) when the Mongols ruled China and brought the Pescadore Islands under their control Taiwan remained a separate entity.

After capturing the Pescadores in 1622, Dutch forces compelled China to sign a treaty that, among other things, provided the Dutch with an outpost on Taiwan in exchange for vacating the Pescadores.<sup>10</sup> This marked the beginning of western colonialism of the island and was quickly followed by Spanish efforts to also establish settlements on Taiwan. The Dutch were the more successful colonists, however, and in 1642 empowered the Dutch East India Company to rule Taiwan. The Chinese population at the time was approximately 30,000, a decided minority as compared to the population of the aborigines.

During the period of the Manchu conquest of China (1646 to 1658), as many as 100,000 Chinese soldiers and sailors operated out of a safe haven on Taiwan while waging an unsuccessful war of resistance against the Manchu invaders. In 1661, after abandoning the fight to restore the Chinese leaders against what became the Ch'ing Dynasty, remnant Chinese forces in Taiwan turned against the Dutch government and evicted them from the island.<sup>11</sup> This marked the first period of official Chinese rule of the island even though its leader, Cheng Ch'eng-kung, was in fact of mixed descent, his father Chinese and his mother Japanese.

Cheng instituted a Ming-style government on the island and encouraged Chinese immigration (which was greatly assisted by a Manchu policy that ordered the evacuation of the coastal areas adjacent to the Taiwan Strait). He refused to recognize the Manchu leadership of China, however, and shortly after his death the Manchu army successfully invaded the island and placed it firmly under Chinese control which was to last for the next 200 years.

Following the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895, China ceded Taiwan and the Pescadores to Japan under the Treaty of Shimonoseki, an act made even more noteworthy because it was formally recognized by the western powers as legitimate.<sup>12</sup> Despite an attempt by some Taiwanese to use this opportunity to establish a separate country, an act that clearly would not be tolerated by Japan, many on Taiwan felt Japanese rule would not be unbearable. Sporadic resistance, wholly unsupported by the government on China, proved little more than a nuisance to the Japanese conquerors. In any event, Japan established full control of the island and continued to rule until control was returned to China following World War II.

It's interesting to note, particularly in light of China's historical claims on Taiwan and of the atrocities committed against the Chinese during the war, that the attitude of the majority of Taiwanese following Japan's defeat was to support continued Japanese rule.<sup>13</sup> Although relegated to virtual second-class status, the lives of the island's residents had dramatically improved during the 50 years they spent under the direction of the Japanese.<sup>14</sup> A modern infrastructure was built, hygiene improved, the educational system enhanced and the overall economy improved commensurate with the growth of Japan's. Other results of Japanese rule were that all children were taught Japanese, received general indoctrination in Japanese culture and were steered away from the study of politics or social sciences. In spite of this immersion in Japanese culture, the Japanese residents themselves remained aloof, shunning the Taiwanese and staying very much to themselves.

The end result, according to John F. Copper, was that "by the beginning of WWII, the Taiwanese inhabitants had either forgotten their

ties with China or saw little reason to try to reestablish them. Most supported Japanese rule, or at least accommodated to it."<sup>15</sup> Many Taiwanese served in the Japanese Army, some even taking part in the atrocities committed against the Chinese peoples, a fact not forgotten by the Chinese after they reestablished rule over Taiwan following the war.

On October 25, 1945 China assumed political control over the island. Chiang Kai-shek established military rule and appointed a ruthless and incompetent governor-general by the name of Ch'en Yi. Interestingly, Chiang chose not to assimilate Taiwan as a Chinese province at that time.<sup>16</sup> During the next two years, as China was embroiled in civil war, the situation on Taiwan deteriorated rapidly. The war effort on the mainland exacted a heavy price, literally dismantling the island's modern infrastructure and demanding vast quantities of food and war materiel that the people could ill afford to contribute.

Following the slaughter of several thousand Taiwanese civilians by Chinese troops in March of 1947, Chiang Kai-shek rescinded military rule, removed the governor-general from his post and appointed some Taiwanese leaders to official positions. He then ordered that Taiwan be made a province of China. In 1949, following the Nationalist defeat by the Communists, Chiang Kai-shek and much of his army fled to Taiwan where they intended to reorganize their forces and launch a counterattack to retake the mainland. Over a million and a half people made their way across the strait during this period, a time when the island was already suffering from the effects of two years of harsh military rule. However, few Taiwanese wanted to be governed by the People's Republic of China and grudgingly accepted Nationalist leadership as the lesser of two evils.

Both Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong fully intended to solve the two-China dilemma by military action. Mao immediately began preparations to attack Taiwan in 1950, a strategy initially delayed by internal problems then rendered completely infeasible by the start of the Korean war. Conversely, though, the Nationalists were hardly a serious threat to reconquer the mainland. They lacked the manpower and the resources that would be necessary to defeat the Communists.

One of the most important side-effects of the Korean War was that Washington resumed military aid to the ROC on Taiwan and throughout the 1950s became increasingly committed to Taiwan's defense, making the possibility of Chinese reunification more remote.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, with the United States Navy interposed between China and Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek was free to focus his efforts on solidifying his government and improving conditions on the island. In these areas he applied lessons learned during his maladministration of the mainland and proved surprisingly adept.

Although it may not have been apparent at the time, the United States decision to defend Taiwan was significant and far-reaching. As Karl Lott Rankin, then Charge d'Affairs in Taipei put it,

President Truman's courageous announcement of June 27 in support of Korea and with the effect of neutralizing Formosa began a new chapter in this island's history. The life of Free China, which previously seemed in danger of immediate extinction, was given new hope at least for the duration of the Korean fighting. For this new lease on life, and for the positive stand taken by the Free World against Communist aggression in the Far East, there was almost universal gratification in Formosa.<sup>18</sup>

Thus began official U.S. commitment to the pro-western and anti-communist government on the island of Taiwan was to last until President Carter ended official diplomatic relations in January 1979. Even then,

when the U.S. formally recognized the People's Republic of China, Congress enacted the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), an intentionally vague attempt to continue to provide for the legitimate security concerns of Taiwan. This issue continues to be the single most divisive issue between the United States and China and, arguably, the most likely point of conflict between the two, trade notwithstanding.

It is clear that the peaceful reunification often spoken of by the PRC leadership would be the optimum way to solve the Taiwan question. The United States, mired in a diplomatic quandary that features recognition of the PRC as the legitimate government of all of China while also providing for the legitimate security concerns of the Republic of China government on Taiwan, would be freed to continue a policy of engagement with China with no apologies. It is highly unlikely, however, that the peaceful reunification of Taiwan with the PRC will occur within the next 5-10 years and even more unlikely that it will occur after that unless a truly democratic regime should emerge in the aftermath of Deng's death.<sup>19</sup> For more than a decade, leaders of the PRC have said in both public and private that they support peaceful reunification with Taiwan.

There has been increasing concern since 1990, however, that Beijing is reexamining its options and may be more disposed to use force to achieve unification. The reason that the PRC is considering the military option is because its strategy of unification through peaceful means has not achieved the goal of incorporating Taiwan under its central administration. Indeed, from the point of view of senior PRC leaders, "Taiwan seems to be slipping away from the embrace of the motherland as the island undergoes rapid democratic change and the natives of Taiwan are

increasingly in control of the government."<sup>20</sup> However, they seem to be ignoring the increases in trade and investment by Taiwan over the past five years.

The decline in relations across the Taiwan Strait has been punctuated by increasingly overt military maneuvers by the PRC, signals of a growing intolerance of the political course Taiwan appears to be taking. The summer of 1995 witnessed the PRC test firing missiles into the sea north of Taiwan, an unmistakable signal of PRC intimidation.<sup>21</sup> The response by Taiwan was an announcement of a major military exercise to be held before National Day (10 October), a move intended as a show of strength of ROC armed forces and a demonstration of resolve.<sup>22</sup>

The reasons supporting the premise that peaceful reunification is not going to happen are many, but suffice it to say for now that the Republic of China (ROC) has no incentive to pursue such a policy. As mentioned earlier, Taiwan has experienced the true Asian miracle in terms of economic growth and, although it depends heavily on trade with the mainland for markets and investments, it has little to gain and much to lose by political reunification. The sentiment of the Taiwan leaders is best captured by a common Taiwanese saying regarding reunification, "Unification is what you can say but don't do, independence is what you do but can't say."<sup>23</sup>

While both governments have claimed the mantle of Chinese leadership since the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949, it is readily apparent that Taiwan's claims on the mainland are little more than rhetoric. Even if ROC leaders were serious about their claims, they simply do not have, nor will they have in the future, the means to

challenge the PRC for the mainland. Taiwan's designs on the mainland will therefore not be considered within this paper. Clearly, however, the reverse is true. Beijing has always had its designs on Taiwan and with significant military modernization occurring, is becoming increasingly capable of taking the island by force. Without a continued US commitment to the government of Taiwan, many believe that this question would have been resolved decades ago.

#### China's Interests

That reunification is one of the PRC's primary goals, and has been since 1949, is unquestioned. After all, the generation of leaders that emerged from the "Long March" were responsible for both winning control of the mainland and for failing to fully consolidate their victory, and would like to see this major blemish on their record erased. Although their time to personally correct this shortcoming has expired, the legacy of the Long March veterans has certainly been passed to their successors. The question yet to be answered, though, is why Taiwan means so much to the PRC? So much that while they speak of peaceful reunification, they repeatedly threaten to use force if Taiwan hints of independence. What national interests are at stake?

Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen referred China's national interests when he made the following remarks during a speech in New York on 29 September 1995: "I would like to reiterate that, on the question of Taiwan, a question of important principle bearing on **China's fundamental interests** [bolding mine], the Chinese government remains firm and unshakable."<sup>24</sup> What are China's fundamental interests and how does Taiwan fit in those interests?

China's overarching interest in reunifying Taiwan can be found in its quest for great power status. Moreover, China's primary interest is in building a strong China that has the economic and military power it needs to pursue foreign and trade policies that will make it a superpower in the twenty-first century.<sup>25</sup> Deng Xiaoping said "It is the common wish of the Chinese people to reunify our country. Once the country is unified, all the Chinese people can not only stand tall, but soar."<sup>26</sup>

The reality, however, is that China does not require the addition of Taiwan to become a great nation. Short of a catastrophe, China's continued economic growth, military modernization and a commensurate increase in diplomatic stature will vault its into superpower status within the next twenty-five years. China's interest in Taiwan is founded in Chinese history and culture. To lose Taiwan would be to lose face and the Chinese leadership can ill afford such a loss particularly during the impending post-Deng transition. As PRC leaders continue to posture to succeed Deng, the Taiwan card becomes an increasingly important and powerful tool. The growing Chinese nationalist movement is a political resource that they simply will not leave untapped.

Other than the quest for great power status, China's interests are very much in line with other nations. These generic national interests include: survival and security; political and territorial integrity; economic stability and well being; and stability and world order.<sup>27</sup> For further insight into China's national interests, Michael D. Swaine, in a 1995 RAND Report on Domestic Change and Foreign Policy in China, identifies three major Chinese objectives:<sup>28</sup>

1. Continued stress on high growth rates through a deepening of market-led, outward-oriented economic reform.

2. Defense of national sovereignty.

3. Attainment of major-power status.

Of these three objectives, the Taiwan issue directly affects national sovereignty and major-power status, and has a limited effect on economic reform. With regard to national sovereignty, there is no doubt that China considers Taiwan to be a province. Chinese leaders have repeatedly stated that any attempt to obstruct the reunification of Taiwan would be met by force. During a speech in September 1995, Chinese Premier Li Peng stated that China will not commit itself to abandoning the use of force in settling the Taiwan issue.<sup>29</sup> China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Chen Jian underscored the sovereignty issue by saying "If Taiwan is taken by foreign force away from China, or if Taiwan declares independence, we will use all necessary means to safeguard our independence, integrity and sovereignty without hesitation."<sup>30</sup>

According to Swaine, the attainment of major-power status is a second reason for the Chinese policy on Taiwan. On 27 September 1995, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen spoke at the 50th session of the United Nations and said, "China's modern history of more than one century following the Opium War was one of tears, blood and humiliation in which the Chinese nation was subjected to repeated aggression, suppression and plunder at the hands of the big powers."<sup>31</sup> China, with over a century of subjugation to western imperialism and Japan, will actively seek recognition as a great power. Part of this equation requires China to

resolve outstanding sovereignty and border issues, particularly that of Taiwan.

The first objective, that of stressing high economic growth rates, is uniquely difficult for Chinese leaders when considering the issue of Taiwan. Increased trade and investment between China and Taiwan has benefited both parties. Any armed conflict, in addition to more serious consequences, would severely disrupt a very profitable relationship. Evan A. Feigenbaum states that "stability is important to both protagonists from a purely economic standpoint but is especially important to Taiwan."<sup>32</sup> China would nevertheless create significant problems for itself if it disrupted the lucrative business relationship that have developed across the strait. In this case, then, China's objective of continued economic growth would be best served by maintenance of the status quo.

#### U.S. Interests

Before discussing U.S. interests in Taiwan, two issues that have a direct bearing on our actions in this case require a brief examination; the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979 and the three joint communiqües. The Taiwan Relations Act, enacted in 1979, was largely a Congressional response to President Carter's normalization of relations agreement with the PRC, a move originated by the Nixon administration. Many Congressional leaders, as well as a majority of the American public, were displeased with the conditions of the agreement particularly in regard to the discontinuance of the security treaty with Taiwan.<sup>33</sup> The TRA includes statements that U.S. recognition of the PRC rested on the expectation of a peaceful future for Taiwan and that any force or coercion against Taiwan would be regarded as a threat to the peace and security of the western

Pacific and "of grave concern" to the United States. Further, the U.S. would continue to provide defensive arms to the Republic of China to ensure that they maintained a sufficient self-defense capability and that the United States would maintain the capacity to resist any use of force or coercion that would threaten Taiwan's security.<sup>34</sup>

The three joint communiqus are often referenced by Beijing in response to U.S. actions or statements toward Taiwan. The Shanghai Communique of 1972 was a milestone document that allowed the process of normalization to begin. It was an agreement by the United States that there was only one China and that Taiwan was a part of China. On the topic of who was the legitimate government of China, however, it was intentionally ambiguous and failed to side with either the PRC or the ROC. The Communique on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations in 1979 clarified the issue with official U.S. recognition of the PRC as the legal government of China and reaffirmed that Taiwan was an inalienable part of China. A third joint communique in 1982 included a pledge from Washington that the U.S. would not increase the quality or quantity of arms sales to Taiwan while Beijing affirmed that peaceful reunification was the fundamental Chinese policy.<sup>35</sup>

It is not surprising, considering the ambiguous official policy of the United States, that it would be somewhat difficult to define United States interests in Taiwan without sounding contradictory. On the one hand, the U.S. has supported and pledged to defend the ROC since 1950. On the other hand, the U.S. has officially recognized the PRC as the legitimate government of all of China since 1979. To allow for a

comparison of U.S. interests in Taiwan with those of China, it is necessary first to review vital national interests.

According to the 1995 United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, U.S. vital national interests include: preserving the survival of the United States as a free and independent nation, with its fundamental values intact and its institutions and people secure; advancing a healthy and growing United States economy to ensure opportunity for individual prosperity and a resource base for national endeavors at home and abroad; promoting a stable and secure world, where political and economic freedom, human rights, and democratic institutions flourish; and finally, enhancing a system of healthy, cooperative and politically vigorous relations with allies and friendly nations.<sup>36</sup>

Specific interests in the Asia-Pacific region naturally support those broad interests listed above. Regional interests include: deterring conflict; expanding U.S. access to Asia-Pacific economies and expanding their growth; preventing domination of the region by any hostile power; preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the systems for delivering them; and promoting the growth of democratic political systems.<sup>37</sup>

The research methodology requires an assessment of U.S. and Chinese interests in Taiwan to determine whether they are complementary or conflicting. Taiwan, however, proves to be a uniquely difficult challenge when attempting to compare interests. The difficulty stems from the aforementioned ambiguity of U.S. policy toward Taiwan. The issue of recognizing that the PRC is the legitimate government of all of China, including Taiwan, while simultaneously pledging to defend Taiwan, a non-

recognized nation whose only possible enemy is the very government the U.S. has recognized as the legitimate government, places U.S. policymakers at a serious disadvantage. Given the fact that U.S. policy is essentially an oxymoron, Washington has historically circumvented it by insisting upon peaceful reunification as the only viable course of action to solve the dilemma. The problem with this position is that the ROC has very little incentive for peaceful reunification. Conflict would thus appear to be the only option for near-term reunification.

In this context, U.S. interests in Taiwan are conflicting with China. China sees reunification as a fundamental national interest. The U.S., while arguably not possessing a vital national interest in the island itself, has a legal interest in its defense (based on the TRA), a historic moral commitment to its government and a overarching desire to see the issue resolved peacefully. Further, the only easy solution would be for Taiwan to agree to reunification. Without any real incentive to peacefully reunite, however, there is no reason to believe the government of Taiwan will unilaterally subordinate itself to the PRC. The situation is compounded by increasing Taiwan overtures toward independence. Beijing has repeatedly stated that any attempt by Taiwan to claim independence would justify the use of force to reunify the country. These circumstances suggest a conclusion of conflicting interests on the issue of Taiwan.

The interest of promoting democracy abroad would be another point of conflicting interests. Taiwan's emerging democratic government is one of the few in the region. The communist government in China, although not diametrically opposed to western ideology as was the former Soviet Union,

is nonetheless anti democratic by definition. The absorption of democratic Taiwan into the PRC, then, would remove a highly successful and visible model of an emerging, capitalist-based democracy from the Asia-Pacific region.

It would be much more difficult to identify other interests in Taiwan as conflicting with those of China. While Taiwan has been a reliable and healthy trading partner for decades, indications are that our trade relationship with China will ultimately prove far more lucrative than with any other nation in the world. This interest, from a purely business perspective, would argue for a rapid resolution of the Taiwan issue under satisfactory terms so that the vast markets of 1.2 billion people could be tapped (an argument dating back to Napoleon or even Marco Polo).

In regard to the prevention of the rise of a regional hegemony, the value of Taiwan lies in its military potential as a forward operating base. In 1950, GEN Douglas MacArthur said "I have been convinced that the strategic interests of the United States would be in jeopardy if Formosa is allowed to be dominated by a power hostile to the United States."<sup>38</sup> The operative phrase in this statement is "a power hostile to the United States." If China were to prove hostile, Taiwan would be extremely important in strategic, operational and tactical terms. Taiwan has often been referred to as an unsinkable aircraft carrier. While the military advantages a strategically situated base could provide are obvious, the potential for its requirement to be used as such are not. Further, while the ROC military may serve to offset the PLA to a degree, they are not capable of containing China. The result is that Taiwan would not prove to

be a decisive factor in preventing the rise of China as a regional hegemony.

The United States' final, official interest in the region is the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the systems for delivering them. Taiwan is not a nuclear power while China has been a member of the nuclear club for decades. If anything, the threat to U.S. interests in this regard is that Taiwan may one day develop a nuclear capability. If this were to occur, China has repeatedly stated it would immediately attack Taiwan. Beijing's continuing threats, on the other hand, coupled with uncertainty about Washington's commitment to Taiwan's security, might make nuclear weapons a more attractive option to Taipei. Viewed from this perspective, the possibility of a nuclear-armed Taiwan could pose a greater threat for conflict than does China, already a nuclear power.

TABLE 1  
COMPARISON OF U.S. AND CHINESE INTERESTS IN TAIWAN

Deter Conflict	Conflicting
Expand U.S. Access to Economies	Conflicting
Prevent Regional Hegemony	Conflicting
Prevent Proliferation of WMD	Complementary
Promote Democracy	Conflicting
Conclusion	Conflicting

### Conclusions

In conclusion, a comparison of the United States and Chinese interests in regard to Taiwan reveals several key conflicting interests. Although this is in large measure due to the ambiguous nature of U.S. policy towards Taiwan, it nonetheless indicates an area where the possibility exists for armed conflict between China and Taiwan which could involve the United States. Based on a number of practical reasons arguing for cooperation, however, the likelihood of conflict with China over Taiwan is low in spite of the existence of a majority of conflicting interests. All three potential participants have a great deal to lose in the event of war and a great deal to gain with a continuance of the status quo. While there is growing sentiment on the island for independence, ROC leaders must recognize that the PRC will not tolerate such a declaration nor would the U.S. come to their defense. Conversely, while PRC leaders maintain their anti-independence rhetoric, particularly as they posture for political position in the post-Deng transition period, the cost of an unprovoked attack against Taiwan would probably be higher than they are willing to risk. Simply put, with or without Taiwan, China has an extremely bright economic future that should prevent PRC leaders from taking overt action to regain the lost province.

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Jiang Zemin, Chinese President in a speech delivered in New York on 23 October, 1995. As reported in "Jiang Reviews China-US Relations," Beijing Review, (November 20-26, 1995): 8.

<sup>2</sup>John F. Copper, Taiwan, Nation-State or Province?, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), ix.

<sup>3</sup>Harry Harding, A Fragile Relationship, (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1992), 346.

<sup>4</sup>Copper, 1.

<sup>5</sup>Central Intelligence Agency, The CIA World Factbook 1995, (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, 1995), 472.

<sup>6</sup>Copper, 8.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>14</sup>David M. Finkelstein, Washington's Taiwan Dilemma, 1949-1950, (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Press, 1993), 45.

<sup>15</sup>Copper, 25.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 26.

<sup>17</sup>U.S. Army, China, A Country Study, (Washington: Department of the Army, US Government Printing Office, 1988), 492.

<sup>18</sup>Finkelstein, 331.

<sup>19</sup>The island of Taiwan is under the de facto control of the Republic of China (ROC), also referred to as Taipei. The mainland of China is under the control of The People's Republic of China (PRC) also known as Beijing. Both sets of authorities claim sovereignty over the Chinese mainland and the island of Taiwan.

<sup>20</sup>Parris H. Chang and Martin L. Lasiter. If China Crosses the Taiwan Strait, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), iv.

<sup>21</sup>Sean Boyne, Taiwan: "Looking Over the Horizon," Jane's Intelligence Review, (November 1995): 501.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 501.

<sup>23</sup>Joseph R. Donovan Jr., "The Effect of Leadership Changes in Taipei and Beijing on the Cross Straits Relationship" (Master's Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1993), vii.

<sup>24</sup>Qian Qichen. As reported in "Qian: Progress Made in Ties, But More Must be Done," Beijing Review, (23-29 October 1995): 13.

<sup>25</sup>Richard Nixon. 1999, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 254.

<sup>26</sup>Bai Liang, "Taiwan Issue Brooks No Foreign Interference," Beijing Review, (6-12 November 1995): 22.

<sup>27</sup>Ted Davis, "Concepts of International Politics and Sovereign Nation-States," Strategic, Operational and Joint Environments (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1995), 39.

<sup>28</sup>Michael D. Swaine, China, Domestic Change and Foreign Policy, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1995), 82.

<sup>29</sup>"Li: US Setting Back Relations," Beijing Review, (9-15 October 1995): 4.

<sup>30</sup>Chen Jian, "News Briefing by Chinese Foreign Ministry," Beijing Review, (6-12 November 1995): 24.

<sup>31</sup>Speech by Chinese Foreign Minister Qian delivered at the 50th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. As reported in Beijing Review, (16-22 October 1995): 21.

<sup>32</sup>Evan A. Feigenbaum, Change in Taiwan and Potential Adversity in the Strait, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1995), 35.

<sup>33</sup>Harding, 85.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>35</sup>China, A Country Study, 493-4.

<sup>36</sup>United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, (Washington: Department of Defense, 1995), 3.

<sup>37</sup>Robert D. Walz, "Describing the Asia-Pacific Security Environment" Strategic, Operational and Joint Environments (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1995), 95.

<sup>38</sup>Finkelstein, 345.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE SPRATLY ISLANDS

In the emerging Asian security environment, the South China Sea remains a troubled area. In particular, a group of low-lying coral reefs and rocky outcrops, known collectively as the Spratly (or Nansha) Islands and which are claimed in whole or in part by six nations, could conceivably be the scene of a future regional conflict. China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei all claim full or partial sovereignty over the archipelago.<sup>1</sup> Until recently, these islands have not supported a permanent population. With the exception of Brunei, however, all of the claimants now maintain a military presence there. While the aggregate land mass of the islands is less than five square kilometers, its strategic significance belies its small size. Further, the Spratly Islands have been the scene of recent military conflict and they continue to attract a tremendous amount of regional and global attention.<sup>2</sup>

The value of the Spratly Islands dispute to this paper again lies in its utility as a forum within which to examine U.S. and Chinese interests. The purpose will be to determine whether the analysis of each country's interests in the area reveals them to be conflicting or complementary. That the U.S. has an interest in the eventual resolution of the dispute cannot be challenged. Indeed, the 1995 United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region specifically identifies the Spratly Islands as one of the key regional issues.<sup>3</sup> How the dispute

is ultimately solved will clearly have a impact on the regional security environment.

This chapter will begin with a brief overview of some of the relevant factors that define the Spratly Island dispute. The intent is simply to provide enough background to establish the basic structure of the problem. To that end, the issue of the Spratly Islands can be condensed into that of a struggle for both the control of their valuable resources and ownership of a strategic position astride some of the world's most heavily used shipping lanes. Though cloaked in claims of historical ownership and settlers rights, claimants to the Spratlys are likely interested in them more as a means to meet their growing requirements for natural resources than for any purely irredentist aims.

This is not an attempt to oversimplify the problem. The issues surrounding the dispute are complex. Take, for example, the potential role of ASEAN in resolving the dispute. ASEAN, as a forum for regional coordination and a force for regional stability, has a lot to gain if it were to be successful in brokering some joint-development and profit-sharing arrangement. In addition to a tremendous boost in its credibility as a forum capable of resolving regional economic issues, it would additionally provide some credibility to the organization's potential role as a regional security body.

Peaceful resolution of the Spratly Islands dispute could also go a long way in helping to clarify and establish precedents for the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (UNLOSC). The UNLOSC, having been introduced in 1993 and ratified in 1994, is probably the most important maritime legislation of the century.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the issues of 200-

mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and the unique problems associated with archipelagos remain a very real problem for the countries of this region. Although it is difficult to imagine, some believe unthinkable, that a consensus regarding the establishment of a 200 mile EEZ around the Spratly Islands might be achieved, the ultimate resolution of this dispute may well be a defining case for how the UNLOSC is interpreted in other areas.

Another peripheral, albeit important issue, that will not be pursued in this paper is that of the growth of Japanese militarism. As will be discussed later, Japan receives the majority of its oil through the South China Sea shipping lanes. Chinese control of this area would clearly make the Japanese less comfortable with existing regional security arrangements and could ultimately lead to a rapid expansion of Japanese military forces to counter China's ability to influence the flow of oil through the area, especially if U.S. naval forces were to be withdrawn from the region.

Given these limitations to this discussion, how does such a seemingly insignificant group of rock outcroppings come to play such a major role in the security of the East Asian-Pacific region? While it is China's claim on the islands that give rise to the greatest security concerns, the answer can be attributed to the interaction of several factors: multiple claimants, regional stability, location along vital sea lanes, rich fishing grounds and the potential of vast oil and gas reserves.

As mentioned earlier, the Spratly Islands are claimed by six nations (see Figure 1). The PRC, for its part, has been firm in its

assertions about rightful Chinese ownership of the entire archipelago. In August 1951, then Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, declared the "inviolable sovereignty of the People's Republic of China over Spratly island and the Paracel archipelago." He later included the "whole Spratly archipelago, the Macclesfield Bank and the Pratas archipelago."<sup>5</sup> While China has remained intentionally vague on many of its territorial claims, its historic waters have been portrayed on official Chinese maps as skirting the shores of Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, forming the so-called "Chinese Lake" in the South China Sea.<sup>6</sup> While they may appear vague publicly, Chinese leaders have clearly established their desires for the incorporation of these waters into their territory.

China's historical claim to the Spratlys is based on naval expeditions beginning as early as the period of the Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-1279). From those early beginnings, China has been intermittently active as a regional naval power. The seven naval expeditions lead by Admiral Zheng He are often cited as the basis of many of China's territorial claims, including the Spratlys, in the South China Sea. Admiral He's expeditions are legendary, his fleets reportedly consisted of up to 300 ships and 30,000 people and sailed as far as the east African coast.<sup>7</sup> Marwyn S. Samuels maintains, however, that any claims to the islands based on these expeditions are not well founded because the Spratlys remained outside of the main shipping lanes during this period.<sup>8</sup> Others date the first official reference of a Chinese presence on the islands only as far back as 1867 when a British survey ship reported encountering Chinese fishermen on Itu Aba, an island, interestingly, which has been occupied by Taiwan since 1956.<sup>9</sup>

In February 1992, the Chinese legislature enacted a law claiming complete sovereignty of the Spratly and Paracel Islands and legitimized the use of force to defend them. The law specifically reserved the right to use military force to prevent violations of her territorial waters around the islands by foreign warships and research vessels.<sup>10</sup> In effect, this means that China, by prohibiting the transit of foreign warships and research vessels through its territorial waters without prior permission, is in violation of the body of international law that provides for the right of innocent passage.

Predictably, Taiwan makes identical claims on the entire Spratly Islands group based on historical Chinese ownership. Chiang Kai-shek had his forces seize the largest of the islands in the archipelago, Itu Aba, in 1947. While it was given up in 1950, Taiwan subsequently reoccupied this important island in 1956 and has maintained a permanent garrison of roughly 600 troops on the island since then.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, Vietnam's claims date back only as far as the latter period of French colonial rule. The French annexed the Spratly Islands in 1933.<sup>12</sup> Following the fall of the South Vietnamese government in 1975, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam consolidated its claims and inherited several islands which had previously been inhabited by South Vietnam.

While the Philippine government asserts that the basis of their claim was a private individual's exploration and occupation of some of the islands from 1947 to 1959, the impetus for making the claim official was increasing PRC assertiveness in the area.<sup>13</sup> The Philippine government issued an official claim in 1971 for a section of the archipelago that included 53 islands. It must be noted that the majority of the islands

that make up the Spratlys are much closer to the Philippines than any other claimant in the region.

Malaysia's first official record of a claim occurred in December 1979. It published a map of the Federation's continental shelf that included about twelve islands. It currently occupies six islands and claims another six, two of which are now occupied by Vietnam.<sup>14</sup>

Brunei's status as a claimant is debatable. Many analysts cite only five Spratly claimants, omitting Brunei. The territory that Brunei seeks title to is called Louisa Reef, an island on the periphery of the group that is nonetheless claimed by both Beijing and Taipei.<sup>15</sup>

The historical evidence regarding claims to the Spratly Islands points toward Chinese ownership although this may in fact simply reflect the greater volume of Chinese historical documents available as compared to the other states. While the Official Chinese claim of centuries of ownership is perhaps overstated, no other nation appears capable of challenging China's claim chronologically. Geographic claims are an entirely different matter. Aside from Taiwan, mainland China is the farthest away of all the claimants from the archipelago. That hasn't deterred Chinese leaders, though, from claiming these and other territories despite their distance from the mainland. China has often been accused of attempting to turn the South China Sea into a Chinese lake.

TABLE 2  
SPRATLY ISLANDS CLAIMANTS

Claimant State	Number of Occupied Islands	Number of islands, cays, etc, claimed
China	7	All
Taiwan	1	All
Vietnam	23	25
Philippines	8	8
Malaysia	3	3
Brunei	0	1

Source: Bruce and Jean Blanche, "Oil and Regional Stability in the South China Sea," Jane's Intelligence Review, (November, 1995): 512.

Due to the fact that there are multiple claimants, the possibility of armed conflict over the Spratly Islands remains real. East Asian regional stability, a concern for not only the area but for much of the world, is at risk. Recent incidents that help provide insight into Chinese resolve in this issue include Chinese occupation of the Philippine's Mischief Reef (located inside waters claimed by the Philippines) in February 1995, the sinking of three Vietnamese supply vessels in March 1988 by the Chinese which included the deaths of 70 people, and the seizure of the Paracel Islands from the Vietnamese in 1974. China has demonstrated a clear willingness to use force to back up its claims.

The significance of the Mischief Reef incident is alarming. Not only has China continued a potentially dangerous policy of island-hopping, but for the first time in two decades Chinese aggression has been directed against a non communist Southeast Asian nation. At least as far as the

U.S. was concerned, it was much more acceptable for China to use force to seize the Paracel Islands because it was directed against an old communist nemesis, Vietnam. Actions against the Philippines, a nation with which the U.S. has a mutual defense treaty, are far more disconcerting and may be indicative of Beijing's increasing willingness to chance an international crisis.

Next, the area lies astride vital sea lanes that afford direct access to the Malacca Strait, the quickest route of passage between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, and the most direct access to the oil-rich countries of southwest Asia. Without guaranteed access to the Straits of Malacca, any ship attempting to transit from the Pacific to the Indian Oceans would face a much more circuitous route. While this linkage is important to all maritime trading nations, the concerns of ASEAN are arguably the most profound. These nations are located on the borders of the South China Sea and trade extensively among themselves. Their economies depend, to a great extent, upon unrestricted passage through the area. Chinese control of the islands could therefore have a significant impact on the health of the ASEAN economies.

The area has abundant natural resources including rich fishing grounds, an industry that supplies fully one third of the diet of the region's peoples and an industry that remains extremely important to the economies of most states in the region.<sup>16</sup> Further, the islands are an important source of guano, a natural fertilizer of sea bird excrement found throughout the Spratlys and a source of much-needed phosphate for the region's farmers.

Finally, the archipelago is potentially rich in oil and gas reserves. Surveys conducted by the Chinese Ministry of Geology and Mineral Resources in the early 1980s estimate that the area contains 25 billion cubic meters of natural gas and 105 billion barrels of oil.<sup>17</sup> Subsequent Chinese surveys conducted in 1994 increased the original estimate to upwards of 225 billion barrels. While the United States, Russia, and members of the international oil industry have to date produced far more conservative estimates, some as low as 7.5 billion barrels, this reserve is nonetheless significant considering the fact that China is expected to soon become a net importer of oil.<sup>18</sup>

#### China's Interests

Chinese interests in the Spratly Islands can be summed up as follows: sole ownership and access to the archipelago's considerable oil and natural gas reserves; access to other natural resources such as fish and guano; control of a major intersection of sea lines of communication (peripheral advantage); forward basing of military and regional surveillance activities and exclusion of the same to other countries; and finally, advancement of the status of China as a great power.

China's oil requirements may be the most compelling reason for its aggressive irredentist assertions. China, a net exporter of oil throughout this century, may soon face critical oil and gas shortages due in large part to its rapid economic growth and modernization. Estimates of the potentially large oil deposits in the Spratlys are therefore extremely important to China. While the discussion of some arrangement for joint development and profit sharing among the claimants is politically attractive, Chinese leaders may see no alternative other than

to continue to strengthen their position as the only legitimate claimant to the area.

In addition to its oil and gas potential, the strategic position of the Spratlys provides ample incentive for Chinese leaders to press their claims of outright ownership. One quarter of the world's maritime trade, and 90 percent of Japan's oil, passes through the South China Sea.<sup>19</sup> Paul Beaver, editor of the South China Sea Newsletter, writes that in the past twelve years "the South China Sea has become an economic growth area in its own right, but also the medium for trade for the world's two new potential super-markets - the southern provinces of China and the economic powerhouse of ASEAN."<sup>20</sup> He adds further that the Malacca Strait is likewise vital to Western and ASEAN merchant traffic, citing the fact that on an average day over 270 ships pass through the strait. The Chinese are acutely aware of the leverage over other states that control of this area would provide. According to Mara Hurwitt,

Control of the Spratlys would greatly increase a regional power's ability to restrict the use of international shipping corridors, economically isolate other nations in the region by interdicting their primary trade routes, and interfere with the transit of military and strategic supplies between the Pacific and Indian Oceans in a time of crisis.<sup>21</sup>

While China's other interests in the Spratlys, including access to other natural resources such as fish and guano, the ability to forward base military and regional surveillance activities, and advancement of China's great power status may not be considered vital in this context, they also are enhanced through total Chinese control of the archipelago. The conclusion must be drawn, therefore, that it is in China's national interest to continue to posture for ownership of the Spratly Islands. While this is not meant to imply that conflict in the region is

inevitable, China's recent aggressions coupled with increasing military capability are certainly areas of concern for the United States.

#### U.S. Interests

As stated in the previous chapter, our vital national interests remain: preserving the survival of the United States as a free and independent nation, with its fundamental values intact and its institutions and people secure; advancing a healthy and growing United States economy to ensure opportunity for individual prosperity and a resource base for national endeavors at home and abroad; promoting a stable and secure world, where political and economic freedom, human rights, and democratic institutions flourish; and finally, enhancing a system of healthy, cooperative and politically vigorous relations with allies and friendly nations.<sup>22</sup>

Regional interests include: deterring conflict; expanding U.S. access to Asia-Pacific economies and expanding their growth; preventing domination of the region by any hostile power; preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the systems for delivering them; and promoting the growth of democratic political systems.<sup>23</sup> In short, the United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region identifies the stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region as a matter of vital national interest. Further, that our interests require sustained engagement by the United States in the area and the maintenance of a credible security presence in Asia is essential for the stability of the region in the emerging post-Cold war environment.

These interests overlap to the extent they are difficult to examine separately. By deterring conflict, the United States will assist

in expanding U.S. access to the economies of the region which will in turn assist in promoting the growth of democratic institutions within the region. Clearly, the U.S. has an interest in maintaining access to the world's fastest growing economies. Additionally, we have an interest in preventing Chinese control of the Malacca Strait and the vital shipping lanes that connect the Indian and Pacific Oceans and allow the most direct access to the oil ports of southwest Asia. The United States Maritime Administration has classified the trade route that passes through the China Sea as "essential."<sup>24</sup> The Pacific Rim is collectively the United States' largest trading partner and will account for about one-third of the world's economic activity by the year 2000.<sup>25</sup>

According to the Institute for National Security Studies' Strategic Assessment 1995, "it is in the long-term U.S. interest to promote the development of governments that share its democratic values and market-oriented approach to economics."<sup>26</sup> In addition to this vision that economic prosperity will assist in creating the conditions that foster the growth of democracy, the United States has a treaty agreement with the Philippines and has enjoyed long-term friendships with other members of ASEAN and neighboring countries who share an interest in the satisfactory resolution of the Spratly Islands dispute. For reasons discussed previously, Chinese control of the Spratlys and the surrounding waters would be counter to this interest.

Finally, U.S. credibility in the region may well be at stake. The United States is seen by ASEAN, indeed by most countries, as the only nation capable of preventing China from forcibly taking the Spratly Islands. Consequently, U.S. credibility and influence in the region

depends on preventing the resolution of the issue in China's favor through the use of force or other coercive means. As one author writes, "The U.S. - and the Navy in particular - is still a welcome ally to the great majority [of regional nations], but it will be welcome only as long as it restrains any excessive Chinese, Indian, Soviet or Japanese naval ambitions."<sup>27</sup>

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF U.S. AND CHINESE INTERESTS IN THE SPRATLY ISLANDS

Deter Conflict	Complementary
Expand U.S. Access to Economies	Conflicting
Prevent Regional Hegemony	Conflicting
Prevent Proliferation of WMD	Complementary
Promote Democracy	Conflicting
Conclusion	Conflicting

Conclusions

In conclusion, the Spratly Islands represent another case of conflicting interests between China and the United States. While we share a common desire for regional stability and increased economic integration and cooperation, the growing Chinese requirement for the oil and other natural resources that the Spratly Islands offer are simply too attractive, some would say necessary, for continued Chinese growth for PRC leaders to agree to share. The result is that China will probably continue to assert irredentist claims on the archipelago, citing ancient Chinese explorers and fishermen as settlers, while pursuing outright

ownership of the islands and the resources they provide in order to satisfy more basic economic concerns. Simply stated, China's growing economy needs the resources and the PRC may be increasingly willing to seize them by force.

The United States, as the only nation capable of unilaterally countering Chinese aggression, will find it extremely difficult to abandon that portion of the South China Sea that provides the prime shipping lanes to the Indian Ocean and access to southwest Asian oil fields. Further, its increasing economic investment and trade with regional nations will compel the U.S. to serve as the guarantor of the area's stability. B. A. Hamzah, director-general of the Malaysian Institute of Maritime Affairs said "China may have the military means to capture the islands, but we must raise the political costs."<sup>28</sup> Although ASEAN will probably continue to grow as a force for regional stability, the United States remains the only power possessing sufficient diplomatic and military clout to raise the costs to a level that may not be acceptable to Beijing.

How willing would China be to use force to take the Spratlys remains unknown. In terms of economic growth, China has a lot to gain by continued stability in the region. The United States, Japan, ASEAN members, and for that matter the rest of the world, also need the stability that would result from a peaceful resolution of the dispute. Chinese leaders have used force in the past, however, and with continued improvements in the PLA's power projection capabilities, it cannot be discounted that they would do so again. China's recent excursion on Mischief Reef may indicate that Beijing considers the Spratly Islands valuable enough to risk conflict in the area for the benefits that such

control would provide. Perhaps the fact that China's designs on this important region remain a real question in the minds of most analysts best supports the argument for a case of conflicting interests.

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook 1995, (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, 1995), 394.

<sup>2</sup>Numerous periodicals reference the Sino-Vietnamese incident of 1988 (that saw the sinking of three Vietnamese cargo ships) as part of their coverage of the ongoing Spratly Islands dispute. See, among others, Michael Pugh's "Maritime Disputes in the China Seas," Jane's Intelligence Review Yearbook, (1994): 107-109.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Defense, United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, (Washington: Office of International Security Affairs, February 1995), 19.

<sup>4</sup>Pugh, 110.

<sup>5</sup>Marwyn S. Samuels, Contest for the South China Sea, (New York: Methuen & Co., 1982), 79.

<sup>6</sup>Nayan Chanda, "Territorial Imperative." Far Eastern Economic Review, (23 February 1995): 16.

<sup>7</sup>Bruce Swanson, Eighth Voyage of the Dragon, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 33.

<sup>8</sup>Samuels, 23.

<sup>9</sup>Mara C. Hurwitt, "U.S. Strategy in Southeast Asia: The Spratly Islands Dispute" (MMAS Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1993), 15.

<sup>10</sup>Brian J. O'Connell, "The Spratly Islands Issue: Strategic Interests and Options" (Individual Study Project, Naval War College, 1992), 7.

<sup>11</sup> "Creeping Irredentism in the Spratly Islands," Strategic Comments, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, March, 1995): 1.

<sup>12</sup>O'Connell, 3.

<sup>13</sup>Samuels, 89.

<sup>14</sup>"Creeping Irredentism in the Spratly Islands," 1.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>16</sup>Pugh, 107.

<sup>17</sup>Blanche, 511.

<sup>18</sup>Although many analysts disagree the status of China as a net importer of oil, most agree that if it hasn't already become a net importer, it soon will. Phillip L. Ritcheson, "China's Impact on Southeast Asian Security," Military Review, (May 1994): 50, cites predictions by some analysts that China will face a 20 percent shortfall

of oil by the year 2000. The author of the previously cited March 1995 IILS report "Creeping Irredentism in the Spratly Islands," makes the assertion that China became a net importer of oil in 1993.

<sup>19</sup> "Creeping Irredentism in the Spratly Islands," 1.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Beaver, ed., "Choke Points: A Cause for Concern," Jane's Sentinel, South China Sea Newsletter, (February, 1995): 1.

<sup>21</sup>Hurwitt, 45.

<sup>22</sup>United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, 3.

<sup>23</sup>Robert D. Walz, "Describing the Asia-Pacific Security Environment," Strategic, Operational and Joint Environments, (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, August 1995), 95.

<sup>24</sup>Harold C. Hinton, The China Sea: The American Stake In Its Future, (New York: National Strategy Information Center, Inc., 1980), 36.

<sup>25</sup>United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, 6.

<sup>26</sup>Strategic assessment 1995, (Washington: National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1995), 22.

<sup>27</sup>J. V. P. Goldrick, and P. D. Jones. "All Eyes on the Western Pacific," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, (March 1992): 69.

<sup>28</sup>Chanda, 14.

## CHAPTER SIX

### KOREA

The Korean peninsula, located between Japan, China and Russia, has, by fate of geography, been the subject of major power competition for many centuries.<sup>1</sup> It has additionally, for the past fifty years, been a divided country, a result of the post-World War II confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. From the Korean perspective, the division of their country can clearly be viewed as another indignity suffered at the hands of foreigners over the centuries.<sup>2</sup> This aberration may not last much longer in the new world order. Although some analysts have predicted the downfall of the North Korean government for decades, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall may accelerate the process.

The historical and cultural traditions of a unified Korean peninsula will prevail in the end.<sup>3</sup> After all, Korea is an old country, its various indigenous peoples evolving into one nation as far back as the seventh century. It existed as a single sovereign entity, although under various dynasties, until it became a colony of Japan in 1910 and then was divided in 1945 at the conclusion of World War II.<sup>4</sup> Tradition itself, however, is not the only factor making reunification likely. There are many practical reasons that point toward eventual reunification with two emerging as particularly important. First, the reigning communist regime in North Korea, increasingly isolated even before Kim Il Song's death, now

receives almost no external support. It is also struggling internally with an awkward and incomplete transfer of power from father to son. Second, most reports indicate that North Korea's economy has been in a steady decline since the mid-1980s while a prospering South Korea continues to enjoy a period of significant, sustained economic growth. As the gap between the two continues to widen, so grows the impetus for change to correct perceived differences.

It must be acknowledged that the United States bears much responsibility for Korea's current disposition. Fearing complete Soviet domination of the Korean peninsula (while understandably preoccupied with finishing the war with Japan), the U.S. presented a hastily prepared proposal that would temporarily divide Korea into two separate zones of occupation, the Soviets occupying and administering that portion above the 38th parallel while the U.S. would accept responsibility for the south. The plan included provisions for an international trusteeship to oversee the transition period with the goal of peaceful reunification to be completed within five years.<sup>5</sup>

Today, over fifty years later, the demilitarized zone (DMZ) continues to separate the two Koreas and has the distinction of being the most heavily armed border in the world. Two armies, with total active forces numbering in excess of a 1.8 million soldiers, face each other along 150 miles of fence, a boundary that represents the separation of a single people by a seemingly irreconcilable ideology. Divided Korea remains the last bastion of the Cold War, bipolar world. As such, many believe that the reunification of the countries is inevitable, the only question being when, and under what circumstances it will occur. Others

maintain that the differences separating the two governments are not as subject to the changes in the new global security environment as was the case in Europe that led to German reunification. Regardless of the belief, there should be little doubt that the future of the Korean peninsula will play a major role in the stability and well-being of the region.

The issue of the two Koreas, for the purpose of this paper, is whether they will be reunified and if so, under what conditions. How reunification could occur clearly has a major impact on both the United States and China. This issue provides this paper's final forum within which to examine U.S. and Chinese interests to determine whether they are complementary or conflicting. Four distinctly different solutions to the question of Korean reunification are immediately apparent. They include:

1. Continuance of the status quo.
2. Indecisive armed conflict with no resultant change.
3. Reunification through armed conflict.
4. Peaceful reunification.

Only two of these options will be considered in this paper. Both solutions that include armed conflict will be excluded from the discussion. The rationale for excluding solutions involving conflict is that it would not be in either the United States' or China's interests for a war to occur on the peninsula. The remaining task is to determine, in broad terms, if it is better for the Koreas to remain separate or to peacefully reunite. In other words, do the United States and China share a like interest in a reunified Korea? Or, conversely, would they both benefit from a continuance to the status quo? If the answers are the

same, that both countries would be best served by a given solution, a determination of complementary interests will be made. If different, then the interests will be conflicting.

For the purposes of this discussion, reunification implies that the South will absorb the North. Given Pyongyang's problems, it is simply impractical to consider the possibility of the North leading, much less Seoul agreeing to, reunification under the communist regime. According to Colonel Glenn Blackburn, "North Korea's decaying condition-failed harvests, food and fuel shortages, and lack of financial support from former communist allies-will require South Korea to inherit the financial burden of reunification."<sup>6</sup> As a point of interest, Blackburn cites a South Korean study that predicts, based on lessons learned from the German experience, that it will cost the South Koreans US \$300 billion over ten years to integrate the North.<sup>7</sup>

#### China's Interests

Prior to the Sino-Soviet rapprochement, China's security relied heavily upon a pro-Chinese regime in Pyongyang. Without it, the Soviets, who were already positioned along the northern and western borders of Manchuria, would also be arrayed along its southern border. Manchuria, long considered China's industrial heartland, was considered vulnerable.<sup>8</sup> To preclude the possibility of facing the Soviets on three sides of Manchuria, Chinese influence in North Korea was thus considered an essential component of Beijing's security strategy.

China's longstanding diplomatic, economic and military support of North Korea was rooted primarily in its own security concerns rather than a shared political ideology. Additionally, part of this arrangement with

Pyongyang included an understanding that China would avoid contact with South Korea as well as stern warnings from Beijing discouraging Pyongyang from initiating direct military action against the South.<sup>9</sup> With a much reduced threat from Russia, however, this situation has changed significantly. In effect, China has been able to pursue more open diplomatic and economic relations with South Korea while retaining a tremendous amount of influence with Pyongyang as North Korea's only remaining "ally".

It can be argued that China's interests would be best served by a continuance of the status quo. In many respects, China enjoys the best possible situation in regard to Korea right now and there is little incentive for Beijing to press for, or even minimally support, efforts toward reunification. With a buffer provided by another communist regime arrayed along its border, a regime that receives virtually no other outside support besides Beijing, China enjoys a degree of security that would quickly disappear if the peninsula were to be reunified.

The reasons are probably obvious. A divided Korea, at odds internally, presents little external threat. A reunified Korea, on the other hand, potentially could become a considerable economic and military power and constitute a direct threat. This is not an attempt to oversimplify the problems that the Koreans would face in the event of reunification. Despite the significant challenges that a reunified Korea would face in integrating the former enemy's military forces, economy, and government, however, the combination of North Korea's resources and the South's industrial base, coupled with a combined standing army numbering

approximately 1.8 million, ensures that Korea would immediately become a formidable economic and military power in Northeast Asia.

In addition to ensuring that its two governments remain focused on internal matters, a divided Korea also provides a buffer against control of the entire peninsula by foreign powers. A reunited Korea dominated by either the United States or Japan would be completely unacceptable to Beijing. Currently, direct foreign influence can extend no closer to China than the 38th parallel. A reunified Korea, economically interdependent with Japan, the free markets of Southeast Asia and the United States, would extend foreign influence north as far as the Yalu River, a wholly discomforting prospect for Beijing.

If the two Koreas can come to terms on reunification, there will exist in the region an immediate imbalance of military power, a situation of grave concern to the Chinese and the Japanese. For this reason, Chinese leaders have been tolerant, even secretly supportive of the U.S. presence in South Korea. It has long been recognized that U.S. troops have had a positive impacted on regional stability, a factor contributing to the impressive growth of regional economies, including China's. Perhaps more importantly, U.S. troops in Korea have not only protected the status quo on the peninsula, but the entire region as well.

Japan remains extremely wary of events across the Korea Strait. A reunified Korea, economically and militarily strong and harboring bitter memories of the Japanese occupation, would be unsettling to say the least. Japanese rule was harsh, and absolute. From the late 1930s until the end of the Second World War, Japanese colonial rulers adopted a policy of assimilation.<sup>10</sup> The Korean people, although in theory subjects of the

emperor and enjoying the same status as the Japanese, were treated as a conquered people. Schools taught only in Japanese, few businesses were owned by Koreans, and belief in the divinity of the emperor was highly encouraged. Had Japanese occupation lasted beyond 1945, indigenous Korean language, culture and religion might have been extinguished.<sup>11</sup>

In view of a potential increased Korean threat, Tokyo would almost certainly be forced into increasing its own military capabilities, a move which would in turn cause serious concern both Beijing and Seoul. As mentioned previously, both Korea and China have suffered terribly from the effects of Japanese militarism in this century and Beijing remains rightfully concerned about the possibility of the reemergence of Japanese militarism. In this respect, the U.S. presence in Korea is reassuring to Beijing because Korean reunification would likely involve the eventual removal of all U.S. troops and increase the possibility of the growth of Japan's military forces.

Some might argue, on the other hand, that reunification would better serve Chinese interests by promoting regional stability through prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It is clearly in China's interests that neither North Korea, South Korea or a reunified Korea acquire nuclear weapons. As the only announced Asian nuclear power, the PRC has consistently worked toward preventing the spread of nuclear weapons in the region. Additionally, despite a concerted effort to upgrade its own nuclear capability, China has pledged a no-first-use of nuclear weapons policy and has repeatedly argued for all other nuclear powers to renounce first-use against non-nuclear states.<sup>12</sup> A nuclear-

capable government on the Korean peninsula could significantly affect the strategic security environment in the entire East Asia-Pacific region.

The implications of such a scenario are ominous. As the only country to have suffered from a nuclear attack, Japan must find the North Korean nuclear program most alarming. A nuclear North Korea would leave Japan little choice but to develop their own nuclear capability.<sup>13</sup> South Korea, though perhaps a bit more comfortable under the U.S. nuclear umbrella than Japan, may also feel a requirement to develop a nuclear capability. Either of these countries as a nuclear power would create serious problems for the Chinese. In view of the nuclear question, then, China would be best served by peaceful reunification because a reunified Korea would be far less likely to continue a nuclear development program. Though not discussed further, it must be noted that a reunified Korea, with a nuclear capability, would present an entirely different set of problems for Beijing.

#### U.S. Interests

U.S. regional interests include: deterring conflict; expanding U.S. access to Asia-Pacific economies and expanding their growth; preventing domination of the region by any hostile power; preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the systems for delivering them; and promoting the growth of democratic political systems.<sup>14</sup>

The often stated goal of deterring conflict in the region is in accord with China's interests. First, the United States maintains troops on the peninsula and American lives would be at stake if there were a war on the peninsula. The continuing threat by North Korea to reunify the

peninsula by force, coupled with the uncertainty surrounding the leadership of Kim Chong-Il, creates conditions of continued instability in the region. Moreover, with over a million soldiers poised within 100km of the border, the possibility of any number of scenarios igniting hostilities remain real. In terms of deterring conflict, it would be in the United States' interest for peaceful reunification to occur with the resultant elimination of the threat of war between the North and the South.

Reunification would also immediately open up the markets of North Korea. Secretary of Defense William Perry said, "We have vital security as well as economic interests in maintaining the strength of our Asia-Pacific markets."<sup>15</sup> Heeding an old business maxim, maintaining one's economic health usually means increasing your share. North Korea, technologically unsophisticated as it may be, nonetheless represents tremendous potential for growth provided the appropriate economic stimulus. Over twenty million people economically isolated from the rest of the world are both potential producers and consumers. North Korea also possesses many of the raw materials that South Korea lacks. While reunification would create short-term hardships, it would eventually result in increased productivity and trade.

Our interest of preventing domination of the region by a hostile power presents a more difficult question. Although on the surface it would appear to argue for reunification by reducing China's direct influence in Pyongyang, a side effect is a probable drastic reduction in U.S. presence in the region. For many reasons, protection of U.S. interests in this issue argues for maintaining the status quo. As

previously discussed, a reduced U.S. presence may lead to a more militaristic Japan, arguably the worst case scenario in the entire equation because of the destabilizing effect it would have on China, the Koreas and the entire region.

Perhaps the greatest threat to U.S. interests on the Korean peninsula is the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Much has been written recently on the nuclear issue in Korea. Many analysts view the purpose of the North Korea's nuclear program as to secure the existence of Pyongyang's regime and that the ambiguity surrounding the issue that causes the West considerable trouble serves that purpose quite well.<sup>16</sup> Even if this is the case, and the probability of the use the weapons is minimal, U.S. interests unquestionably lie in a non-nuclear Korea. By eliminating Pyongyang's quest for international respect, currently held only through the threat of becoming a nuclear power, reunification would limit the proliferation of these weapons and would be a major force for regional stability.

Promoting the growth of democratic political systems argues for reunification. First, it is recognized that South Korea itself does not yet represent a model democracy. In fact, when compared to mature Western governments, it still represents more of an autocratic regime than a democracy. Indeed, from 1962 to 1987 South Korea had only two presidents, both of whom former army generals who assumed power through violent coups.<sup>17</sup> Had this occurred in another hemisphere, this fact alone may have justified armed U.S. intervention, as opposed to overt support. Since then, however, there have been two elections and two presidents, in

1987 and 1992. It is noteworthy that Kim Young Sam took office in 1992 as the first ROK president without a military background since 1960.<sup>18</sup>

There are numerous other indications that South Korea is becoming more democratic, one of which being the rise of a genuine middle class.<sup>19</sup> Finally, when compared to the regime in Pyongyang, the government in Seoul nonetheless represents an established, if imperfect, democracy. Reunification, at least in the more plausible scenario where the South absorbs the North, would thus increase the spread of democracy in the region and serve the stated interests of the United States.

Another U.S. interest is limiting the proliferation of conventional weapons through the limitation of arms sales. In regard to North Korea's increasing resource shortages and decreasing financial support, K.I. Park writes "A worrying side effect of the economic difficulties, however, is North Korea's willingness to trade weapons for oil."<sup>20</sup> The capability to influence arms sales would favor reunification based on the fact that several of North Korea's currency-rich but hardware-starved customers include nations very much opposed to the United States. Park continues, "In particular, there is clear evidence that the North Koreans have sold missiles and possible missile technology to Middle Eastern countries such as Iran."<sup>21</sup>

The various interests of the United States, like those of China, are not in harmony in regard to Korean reunification. The U.S. enjoys numerous peripheral benefits from a significant military commitment to South Korea. It could be argued that the status quo is serving U.S. interests admirably. The very event of reunification would bring a host of problems to the Korean government, potentially very destabilizing, and

could compel the United States to commit considerable resources toward their resolution. Moreover, the need for a U.S. military presence in East Asia, which has served to guarantee a voice in regional affairs for decades, would probably be dramatically reduced. A strong U.S. presence has also decreased the possibility of an arms race involving China, Korea and other regional nations.

Conversely, reunification would greatly enhance regional stability by erasing the possibility of war along the 38th parallel. It would open up technology-starved North Korean markets and integrate over twenty million Asians into a democratic form of government. Perhaps most significantly, it would reduce the potential for the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Assuming that the Korean economy would eventually recover from the shock of absorbing the North's problems, reunification would ultimately serve the interests of the United States by integrating its peoples and resources into a government proven to be a responsible member of the global community and favorable to the west. The preponderance of evidence indicates that Korean reunification would be in the best interests of the United States.

TABLE 4  
COMPARISON OF U.S. AND CHINESE INTERESTS IN KOREA

Deter Conflict	Complementary
Expand U.S. Access to Economies	Conflicting
Prevent Regional Hegemony	Conflicting
Prevent Proliferation of WMD	Complementary
Promote Democracy	Conflicting
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Conflicting</b>

Conclusions

China's interests in the reunification of Korea are mixed. China currently enjoys the protection of one of its borders by a friendly communist regime without the accompanying restrictions that are often inherent in such relationships. They share a common form of government (although it could be argued that some China's emerging market-based economic policies are becoming more closely identified with Seoul than with Pyongyang). A divided Korea poses little threat to its northern neighbor except in terms of a threat to regional stability. More importantly, a divided Korea is likely to ensure a continued U.S. presence and a hedge against possible reemergent Japanese militarism.

On the other hand, the threat of a nuclear North Korea may indicate China's interests are best served by peaceful reunification. While the fear of an increasingly isolated North Korea risking everything in a nuclear confrontation is certainly not limited to Beijing, China's proximity to the potential nuclear battlefield is particularly alarming.

However, on balance, China's interests are best served by continuing the status quo. China benefits greatly from a divided Korea. Its security is enhanced with a communist regime, thoroughly indebted to Beijing, protecting a portion of the Manchurian border. A divided Korea reduces the threat of rising Japanese militarism while virtually ensuring a continued U.S. presence. China has established relations with Seoul and has shown no ideological misgivings about developing this potentially lucrative trading relationship. The nuclear proliferation threat, while certainly a major concern, can be somewhat managed through China's enormous diplomatic clout with isolated Pyongyang.

U.S. interests, although similar to China in that they are also internally conflicting, argue more for reunification. Simply stated, reunification would deter conflict, expand U.S. access by opening the former North Korean markets, be beneficial to the Korean economy in the long-term, promote the growth of democracy and prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Further, reunification would lead to a reduction of conventional arms sales to unsavory nations.

The reverse argument, that the status quo best serves U.S. interests, is largely based upon benefits derived from maintaining a significant U.S. military presence on the peninsula and the positive effect of a divided Korea on the balance of power in the region. Further, that the effect of a united Korea would be an immediate shift in the balance of power and regional instability, conditions that could quickly result in a arms race involving China, Japan and Korea. In spite of these arguments, the balance of U.S. interests lie on the side of reunification.

In conclusion, the United States and China both have internally conflicting interests in the issue of Korean reunification. Further, some complementary interests exist between the two countries. It cannot be disputed that the entire region would benefit from a reduction of the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Likewise, an elimination of the most heavily armed border in the world would serve the overarching interest of regional stability. Complementary interests arguing for the status quo is the uncertainty surrounding the possibility of Japanese militarism, a potentially destabilizing consequence of reunification. Aside from these points, however, U.S. and Chinese interests diverge. In sum, China's interests weigh on the side of maintaining the status quo. The United States's interests would be better served by peaceful reunification. While the comparison of U.S. and Chinese interests in Korea is far less straightforward than was the case in the previous discussions of Taiwan and the Spratly Islands, a determination of conflicting interests must again be made.

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Department of the Army, South Korea: A Country Study, (Washington: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Fourth Edition, 1992), xxiv. Other notable indignities suffered by Korea include nearly 35 years of harsh Japanese occupation that only ended in 1945 and numerous periods of various Chinese and Japanese invasions and subjugation over the past several centuries.

<sup>2</sup>Donald S. McDonald, "The Role of the Major Powers in the Reunification of Korea," The Washington Quarterly, (Summer, 1992): 135.

<sup>3</sup>K. I. Park, "North Korea Provokes Concern," International Defense Review, (November 1993): 884.

<sup>4</sup>South Korea: A Country Study, 3.

<sup>5</sup>Owen D. Ryan, "Potential for Reunification of the Koreas and the Impact on U.S. Policy" (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1993), 2.

<sup>6</sup>N. Glenn Blackburn, "The Korean Peninsula: A Northeast Asian Security Concern" (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1993), 16.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas L. Wilborn, "How Northeast Asians View Their Security" (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1991), 17. See also Paul H. B. Goodwin, "The Chinese Communist Armed Forces" (Montgomery, AL: Air University Press, 1988). Goodwin argues that Chiang Kai-shek saw Manchuria as the "industrial heart of postwar China" and fought the decisive campaign of the Chinese Civil War for its control. When Manchuria fell to the Communists, Chiang Kai-shek lost the best of his military forces along with any chance of winning the war on the mainland and the KMT crumbled. Following his defeat there in January 1949, Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists fled to Taiwan (See Chapter Five for further discussion on Taiwan).

<sup>9</sup>Wilborn, 18.

<sup>10</sup>South Korea: A Country Study, 23.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>12</sup>"China Airs Stand on Nuclear Testing," Beijing Review, (18-24 October, 1993): 4.

<sup>13</sup>Mike Howarth, "Japan Ready for Longer Military Reach," International Defense Review, (September 1994): 33. Howarth references a well-placed source in Tokyo who suggests that Japan could become a nuclear power in six months, far less time than the three years generally supposed.

<sup>14</sup>Robert D. Walz, "Describing the Asia-Pacific Security Environment" Strategic, Operational and Joint Environments, (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1995), 95.

<sup>15</sup>Remarks by Secretary of Defense William Perry to the Washington State China Relations Council, Federal Document Clearing House, Tuesday, 31 October 1995: A3.

<sup>16</sup>Strategic Assessment 1995, (Washington: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1995), 23.

<sup>17</sup>Ryan, 13.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>20</sup>Park, 883.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 883.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on a comparison of U.S. and Chinese interests in the three case studies considered in this paper, China, with a modernized military, poses a threat to the United States. While the degree of the threat is difficult to ascertain, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that, at a minimum, China could threaten United States interests in the East Asia-Pacific region. How willing PRC leaders would be to use force in a scenario that could involve the United States is unknown. China's sustained economic success, which has been fueled by a transition to a more open, market-based economy, is increasingly dependent on foreign trade and conflict with the United States would significantly and adversely affect China's economy. It must also be acknowledged that China will continue to play an ever-increasing role in the security of the region. Given the United States' significant investment and prominent role in the region since 1945, it is inevitable that as China's influence grows, our interests will intersect. Whether this constitutes a threat depends on if these interests are complementary or conflicting.

The methodology used in this paper, after first establishing that the PLA was in fact modernizing, was to examine Chinese and U.S. interests in three areas; Taiwan, the Spratly Islands and Korea, in order to determine whether they were conflicting or complementary. The rationale was that simply the fact that China is modernizing its military does not

necessarily translate into a threat to the United States. In addition to capability, there must exist some intention or some compelling reason for China to use that capability in order to call the modernization of China's military a threat.

As an example, if the United Kingdom were to suddenly announce that it was going to substantially modernize its armed forces, the United States would not likely be concerned. Likewise, the U.K. does not feel threatened when the United States makes a decision to modernize its forces. In fact, the U.S. may even feel that its own security is enhanced when the other country increases its capabilities. The reason is simple. Neither the United Kingdom nor the United States feel threatened by one another. They do not feel threatened by each other because their interests, for the most part, are complementary.

Thus, even though the Chinese military is clearly in a process of modernizing its armed forces, this does not, in and of itself, constitute a threat to the United States. It may be a threat, however, if China and the United States have conflicting interests in an area or areas that each feel are important enough to commit their armed forces to defend. Therefore, if an examination of relevant and substantial issues reveals that China and the U.S. have conflicting interests, then the modernization of the PLA could be considered a threat to the United States. Although a determination of conflicting interests does not necessarily mean that armed conflict is inevitable, or even likely, it nevertheless would mandate that particular attention be devoted to the matter. If nothing else, a determination of conflicting interests would likely have an impact

on decisions regarding force structures, alliances and other regional security measures.

In China's case, what makes the examination of interests even more relevant is the nature of the modernization that is taking place. Since its existence, the PRC has been organized to fight a large-scale, low-tech, protracted war on the mainland, aptly described by Mao Zedong's concept of "People's War." To paraphrase, Mao envisaged absorbing an initial attack, drawing an invading army deep into the Chinese mainland and then destroying them in detail. PRC leaders have not been blind to recent changes that have had an effect on the nature of modern warfare, however, and beginning in the 1980s began to modify Mao's original concept into a People's War under modern conditions.

Using lessons learned from the Korean War, China's war with Vietnam in 1979, and most recently the Gulf War, PRC doctrine now emphasizes a smaller, better trained force with technological improvements made possible through the country's economic successes. In short, China has recognized a need to modify its equipment, organizations and doctrine in order to fight limited wars on its periphery, a much more likely scenario than the total war on the mainland previously anticipated.

According to Colonel Karl Eikenberry, the PLA's modernization efforts have been designed to emphasize "the creation of highly mobile, elite units, capable of bringing Chinese military power to bear swiftly at potential flash points along its vast borders, which do encompass much of the Asia-Pacific region."<sup>1</sup> Citing significant resource constraints and large security requirements, however, Eikenberry does not see the PLA's current doctrinal literature and training regimes as sufficient to support

China in contesting the regional security order, at least not in the next decade.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the significance of this doctrinal shift lies in the development of a power projection capability and the ability to influence the region well beyond traditional PLA operating areas. Moreover, it better supports prosecuting a strategy of limited war, a strategy that appears far more suitable for satisfying growing Chinese irredentism in the region.

Given that Chinese military modernization is occurring, an analysis of Chinese and U.S. interests must be conducted in order to determine whether or not it represents a threat to the United States or threatens our interests in the region. That the U.S. has significant interests in the Far East cannot be disputed. As Winston Lord, assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific affairs said during his Senate confirmation hearings,

Today, no region in the world is more important for the United States than Asia and the Pacific. Tomorrow, in the 21st Century, no region will be as important. In that vast area most of the world's people live. Many of the richest cultures flourish. The major powers intersect.

America has fought three wars in Asia during the last half-century. We have abiding security interests there. Forty percent of our trade is with the region, its share swelling more rapidly than of any other, and half again as large as with Western Europe. More and more eager, talented Asian immigrants enrich America's cultural and economic mosaic. Our nation's population and production shift steadily toward our Pacific coast. In sum, the firmest guarantees of America's staying power in Asia -- more credible than rhetoric from the rostrum or writs on paper -- are **our overriding national interests** [bolding mine].<sup>3</sup>

The case studies used in this paper were selected to provide an opportunity to examine China's interests as compared to the United States in three distinctly different, yet interrelated areas. The Taiwan "one-China" question, the Spratly Islands dispute and the future of the Korean

peninsula each represent potential problem areas for U.S.-Chinese relations, the Far East region, and the rest of the world. While there are numerous other areas that would be suitable for examination, these three were selected because they represent relevant and timely issues with a real potential for armed conflict. In short, potentially destabilizing issues that could quickly evolve into major regional crises.

As noted earlier, conflicting interests do not necessarily precipitate conflict. They do, however, provide indicators of the possibility of confrontations or the likely peaceful resolution of issues. Interests are the basis of analysis in this paper and support the application of deductive reasoning to an otherwise subjective topic. Simply stated, if China has the military capability to pose a threat to the United States, then the U.S. must examine the interests of the two nations in order to assess the probability of conflict.

A comparison of U.S. and Chinese interests in Taiwan revealed several key, conflicting interests. Extensive Chinese military maneuvers and missile firings in the Taiwan Strait in March 1996, intended to intimidate Taiwanese voters prior to the island's first true democratic elections and a clear statement of Beijing's unending resolve, perhaps best show the volatility of this issue. As discussed in chapter Four, the difficulty with this comparison is the inherent ambiguity in U.S. policy towards Taiwan. In spite of a clear case of conflicting interests, however, the conclusion drawn from this research is that the probability of armed conflict over Taiwan remains low. Each of the three principal parties, China, Taiwan and the United States, have a great deal to lose in the event of war and a great deal to gain from maintaining the status quo.

It is important, however, that Washington clearly and openly defines its position regarding Taiwan. Unless Washington is willing to commit to providing assistance to Taiwan in the event of an invasion, the President must caution Taiwan against declaring independence. Likewise, the President must make it clear to Beijing that it will not tolerate armed aggression from the mainland to settle the issue.

Analysis of the Spratly Islands dispute also revealed conflicting interests. Although the U.S. and China share a common interest in maintaining regional stability, China has an ever-increasing requirement for the abundant natural resources of the archipelago, namely its oil and natural gas reserves. The PRC has also demonstrated recently that it is willing to use force to pursue its claims in the South China Sea. Seizure of the Paracel Islands in 1974, the sinking of Vietnamese vessels in 1988 and the Mischief Reef incident in 1995 are all indicative of Chinese willingness to use force to press its claims. The U.S., in addition to the requirement to maintain the vital shipping lanes that run astride the Spratly Islands, may also find its regional credibility at stake in the Spratly Islands dispute. The end result is an area of conflicting U.S. and Chinese interests, an area that may be more likely to see conflict for the reason that it is less decisive. Whereas a war over Taiwan would be extremely costly in almost all respects, China may view the Spratly Islands as an opportunity to prosecute a limited war, one which could be won without sacrificing its economy and without risking a total war in the process.

Analyzing Korea proved to be a much more difficult challenge because both the U.S. and China have internally conflicting interests in

Korean reunification. On balance, however, China's interests are best served by maintaining a divided Korea whereas the United States' interests argue more for reunification. Neither country would benefit from a resolution of the issue from armed conflict. Both countries would benefit from the elimination of the North Korean nuclear program, an issue with implications for the stability of entire region. The result is that even though the U.S. and China have conflicting interests, the likelihood of armed conflict is low.

In sum, the three case studies reveal substantial conflicting interests between the United States and China. This is not to imply that there are not a number of areas where complementary interests exist. Nevertheless, modernization of the PLA poses a threat to the United States, or perhaps more accurately, poses a threat to United States interests in the Asia-Pacific region. The only direct threat to the United States is Chinese nuclear weapons. There is no reason, however, to believe that PRC leaders would entertain any thoughts of initiating a nuclear war, particularly in view of the overwhelming retaliatory response capability of the United States. The issue of nuclear war, being outside the scope of this paper, was not addressed.

In answering the central question of this paper, it has been established that the existence of substantial conflicting interests indicates that the modernization of China's military poses a threat to the United States. A subsequent requirement, probably a thesis in itself, is to attempt to define the degree of the threat and determine an appropriate course of action for the United States to counter that threat. While it was not the intent of this paper to offer a solution, it is clear that the

appropriate course of action would likely include a combination of all instruments of national power.

Most analysts agree that a significant U.S. military presence in the region is critical to protecting American interests and in maintaining regional stability. Likewise, diplomatic efforts will continue to be an essential element of the engagement strategy in regard to China. Economic policy may yet prove to be the most effective instrument of power in countering the Chinese threat. The greater China depends on the United States and the rest of the world for its economic well-being, the more influential economic policy will be in shaping regional security and the less likely the PRC will be to use force to settle international conflicts. Finally, information technology, which has already created a revolution in the developed world, will continue to have a greater impact in China and, properly employed, will also prove an effective source of power.

In conclusion, China, despite the existence of conflicting interests, is not likely to threaten the United States militarily in the near future. Although the modernization efforts underway clearly increase its capabilities to influence events outside its borders, most analysts agree that China's numerically-superior but technologically-inferior military forces lag years behind the United States. In October 1995, Secretary of Defense William Perry said, "At its present level and at its present pace, I do not see reason for alarm from China's modernization program. Certainly, I see no substantial threat to the United States."<sup>4</sup> Karl Eikenberry agrees, saying that "China today is neither at the

periphery nor the core; it is a middle-ranking state very much constrained by the distribution of power within the Asia-Pacific region."<sup>5</sup>

Is China, as Napoleon feared, awakening? And if so, what are the implications for the United States? One thing is for certain--the global economic center of gravity is shifting to the Asia-Pacific region. Recognizing this, it is important that U.S. national security strategy continue to adapt to this change to ensure continued regional stability and economic prosperity.<sup>6</sup> In all probability China will be the dominant Asian power in the twenty-first century. To that end, it is important that the U.S. recognize those areas that can lead to conflict with China. Not only can the U.S. ensure that it has the requisite strategy and force structure in place to deal with the threat to its interests in the Asia-Pacific region, it will also have a much better chance of avoiding conflict in the first place. The first step is a recognition that, despite the occurrence of a great deal of positive changes that are occurring, China, with a modernized military, is clearly a threat.

Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Karl W. Eikenberry, "Does China Threaten Asia-Pacific Regional Stability?" Parameters, (Spring, 1995): 93.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>3</sup>Winston Lord, Statement at Senate Confirmation Hearings, U.S. Department of State Dispatch, (Washington: Vol. 4, No. 14, April, 1993).

<sup>4</sup>Remarks made by Secretary of Defense William Perry to the Washington State China Relations Council, (Washington: Federal Document Clearing House, 30 October 1995), A6.

<sup>5</sup>Eikenberry, 95.

<sup>6</sup>R.A. Cossa, "The New Pacific Environment: Defining the Challenges," The New Pacific Security Environment: Challenges and Opportunities, (Washington: National Defense University, 1993), 305.

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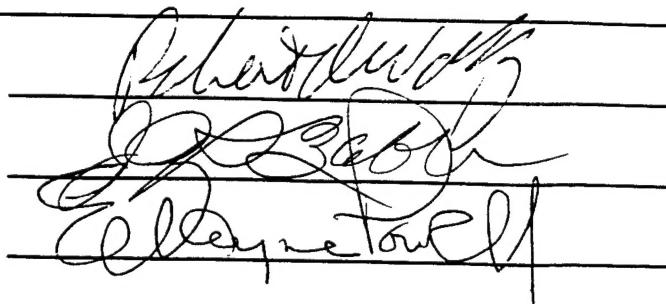
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